

HIP-HOP, SPIRITUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT
Utilizing Hip-hop Culture as a Medium to Create Spaces of Social and Spiritual
Transformation

By

Walter Lizandro Hidalgo-Olivares

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ABSTRACT

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Hip-hop culture's birthplace is in the South Bronx which is also the home of El Fogon Center for the Arts—the community in which I serve. With over twenty-two years' experience in Hip-hop culture and twelve years' of experience in lay leadership, I have found that youth and young adults ages 18-24 are strongly influenced by negative lyrical content and multi-media imagery that is associated with Rap music, ultimately creating a spiritual crisis. This predicament affects the future of countless youth, communities and Hip-hop culture in a negative way, especially considering Hip-hop's global influence as a multi-billion dollar industry. From a spiritual perspective, the consequences are much broader in scale when you consider the phenomenon of dying mainstream churches and other faith-based communities due to its dwindling numbers. So who or what is now helping to fill these spiritual voids to these countless thirsty souls from the streets?

This demonstration project will attempt to create a public awareness campaign that will teach this demographic the original intentions of Hip-hop culture, for the purpose of encouraging this population to stay true to its original objective. In applying ethnographic research through countless interviews with Hip-hop artist and organizations through communal events, focus group stimuli and ministerial work, we are able to capture for the first time ever an intergenerational dialogue that connects Hip-hop cultures history with its spiritual trajectory. The results of this case study indicate that Hip-hop culture can serve as an alternative pathway to the traditional views and interpretations of sacred spaces and spirituality. Because of its unlimited capabilities (via its aesthetics) along with its ability to organically create spaces for ecumenical dialogue, Hip-hop is helping to connect countless human beings that are searching for God through purpose—the beginning of the spiritual journey.

I want to first and foremost give praise to the Almighty Creator; it is because of Him all things are made possible. To my daughter Genesis, family, friends, my site team, project team members, my editors and focus group participants—I did this for you! I also want to acknowledge New York Theological Seminary for being at the forefront of progressive ministerial studies and spiritual revolution. And last and certainly not least, I want to thank Hip-hop Culture for making me free!

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INTRODUCTION

For the first time ever I felt that I did not feel the need to satisfy the demands associated with my own culture and ethnic heritage. I no longer felt the need to submit to the ideals and theories that academia can sometimes trap you into believing. I no longer needed the approval of strict dogma that is currently dominating the religious landscape and leaving spirituality behind. I found sanctuary and comfort in knowing that there is something much bigger than myself and it is participating in my life. I found comfort in knowing that there are many ways to align my existence with the Creator and my soul. And, despite all of the challenges that life continues to throw at me, I know who I am and what God has intended for me to do during my short time here on this earth. I finally know what my purpose in this life is. With this knowledge, my spiritual path has become clearer and I no longer am the same person, but I am altogether new—transformed.

This revelation presented itself to me through a variety of experiences throughout my life: from my first introduction to meditation through martial arts training; to reading Dr. James Cones book, *Black Theology and Black Power*; and the most challenging untold stories in my own personal life (like the first time my mother told me her father's murder was due to him speaking out against a government that was killing our indigenous people in Guatemala). While each situation had its own significance and purpose, they were far from being mutually exclusive. Instead, each story represented this ongoing spiritual journey of “knowing thy self,” which has ultimately led me to my own freedom.

Meditation served as an excellent means for calming all of the noise in my head. In clearing my mind, I allowed clarity into it which in turn allowed me to focus and stay disciplined. From a martial arts perspective, it helped bring balance—the yin and yang—between learning violence and being non-violent.

Cone's book, *Black Theology and Black Power*—my true introduction to Liberation Theology—taught me to look at the Bible from the perspective of liberation. Liberation Theology taught me that God and the scriptures also speak to suffering people and that these are just as favorable in the eyes of God as those who have been privileged.

I was born and raised in the South Side of Providence, Rhode Island to immigrant parents who came to the United States from Guatemala during a period of much violence and economic hardship. Guatemala in the 1960s and 1970s saw one of its worst moments during its civil war and concomitant political turmoil. While job opportunities were scarce for my father in the countryside, my mother became the victim of those who opposed her father's revolutionary voice to end genocide.

I'll never forget the first time my mother told me and my older sister what had happened to our grandfather, Tino Olivares. He was murdered, as tears rolled down her eyes, because he believed that life was not worth living if you did not tell the truth.

Their experiences would eventually become my motivation to do the work that I do today, particularly from a social justice and faith-based perspective. From serving the immigrant communities in my hometown of Providence, Rhode Island, to my long standing passion for working with youth, social justice stands at the core of my heart and being.

But of course, the context from which my parents came was quite different from the one in which I grew up. English became my second language and I remember always having to speak Spanish to my parents while in the house and listening to a lot of Latin music, all to maintain the essence of our identity. From Ranchera music from Mexico to the beautiful sounds of Cumbia from the country of Colombia, music was a large part of the life for my siblings and I.

When I was growing up I was heavily into sports, music (of course), and chasing after girls—not unlike any other teenage boy. Despite the linguistic challenges and cultural differences that existed in a small yet extremely diverse city in New England, I fell in love with one particular culture of dress, music, talk and dance. Some would define these mores as urban culture, but I, and so many others, understood it to be Hip-hop.

I gravitated to this culture above all others—i.e. Latino, corporate, academic and yes religious—because for me it was the rawest, realist and most free-flowing form of creative human expression comprehensible. Its inclusivity in a very exclusive society allowed for me to feel a part of a broader community by encouraging me to create, to feel and to share. With so many of my friends involved in its development, it naturally became a part of who I was and what would become of me.

As time moved forward, I invested in my love for the culture by finding solace in its aesthetics—b-boy/girl dancing, graffiting, DJing and eMCeeing. These art forms were studied, formally and informally, through observation (watching music videos on Uncle Ralph McDaniel’s Video Music Box channel) and through practice (tagging, or graffiting, on the back pages of my notebooks during class).

I also remember hearing about the exploits of Crazy Legs from New York because he would always visit the Carriage House on the East Side of Providence to provide break dancing classes to kids in the neighborhood. The East Side—like all of Providence really—had a huge gang problem, and the Carriage House became a community safe haven for youth to escape gang culture, acquire skills, and engage with positive role models.

But it was ultimately eMCeeing that caught my full attention because of its creative word play, rhetorical genius and my all time favorite, my love for the cipher—which, included battle rapping. In my lifetime I witnessed many rap battles, a competition between two—sometimes more—eMCees for the title of the best lyricist. Most of them occurred organically in settings such as house parties or after school. This friendly competition may be the reason why I am very passionate about the culture, having witnessed firsthand its inextricable power to draw people of all backgrounds together to show skills.

In the midst of this self-expression I was enwrapped in my own faith journey as a church participant (mostly by force thanks to my parents), mastering my meditation through martial arts training, and later attending vocational retreats as I considered entering the priesthood. I always felt an urge to serve God in one way or another. I guess that is why today I continue down that path by working as the Director of Social Justice Ministry for the Altagracia Center for Faith and Justice in New York City. Much of this is the result of my parents embedding Church culture into our lives by attending mass every Sunday, participating in as many retreats as possible, and praying frequently as a family.

Now that I look back, I can definitely say that had it not been for my parent's unyielding efforts to maintain God in our lives, I would have been lost. Church provided me with an extended family while simultaneously teaching me the ways of Jesus Christ who I continue to love and admire. But it was during the period between college and attending graduate school that I felt something that can only be described as a “push” or “calling.”

I needed to take my discernment to serve God to another level, so in 2007 I decided to attend Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University in New York City. My inspiration to attend this progressive school came from one of my mentors who told me that I did not need to wear the collar in order to serve God. This frame of thinking stayed with me and it was those two years at seminary that pushed me to work on ecumenical endeavors.

Here, I had my own faith perspective challenged by bringing together a diversity of people from all over the world who had their own varying theological interpretations. My understanding of the Divine became altered because it pushed me to dig deeper by looking at the Divine from a more multi-dimensional perspective—a more inclusive God. From Buddhism, to Santeria to the humanist, all were coming together to explore each other in the midst of trying to make sense of the world and how the Divine continues to work in it. Those few years changed my life forever yet I remained grounded—and very critical—of my own Roman Catholicism, while maintaining my identity as a Hip-hopper.

This transformation following seminary forced me to reflect a lot upon my own life. It was throughout my studies and soon afterwards that I began to travel the world fairly frequently to conduct presentations and attend conferences. I was blessed to go to

places such as Switzerland, Colombia, Cuba, Ireland, and South Korea. While visiting these places I used what Hip-hop culture calls “edutainment” (the combination of education and entertainment) by incorporating Hip-hop pedagogy with spirituality to convey my own story, and that of countless other Hip-hoppers who were experiencing its transformative power.

The combination of my experiences using Hip-hop to bring purpose into my life and that of other Hip-hoppers who were doing the same serves as an educational tool that shows Hip-hop culture’s global uniformity and history. In other words, I was acting as if I was a Hip-hop ambassador by utilizing Hip-hop culture to communicate peace, love, unity, and having fun.

Now, as a doctoral candidate at New York Theological Seminary, I’ve been granted permission to do research on a topic that has never been told in this context nor documented—*Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment*. As part of my project I conducted ethnographic research and participant-observational, or action reflection, methodological approaches for the purposes of educating the general public of Hip-hop culture’s history, which includes a spiritual trajectory for those who participate (and observe) in it.

The Doctor of Ministry program forced me to formulate my ideas by structuring them in such a way that it can be used in ministry to transform lives. This is extremely important as there currently exist no Hip-hop and spirituality curriculum for ministerial purposes. Therefore, this project could serve as a template for such a curriculum in the near future.

Because of my deep metamorphosis while in seminary, I wanted to see if this same dynamic could be applied to Hip-hop culture (and this doctoral project) by providing a platform for these broader theological, social and spiritual dialogues given Hip-hop's unyielding efforts to bring together such a diversity of human beings. From an outsider looking in, the dominant view continues to be that of viewing Hip-hop from an entertaining and sub-cultural lens which places limits on its potential for being something much more. But what many fail to realize is that when people from the Hip-hop Diaspora utilize the culture as a platform for safe and sacred self-expression—both artistically and verbally—they organically transform these divested spaces into communities of love and spirituality through the reaffirmation, co-authorship and co-creatorship of the Divine via Hip-hop culture's fifth element of knowledge.

Knowledge has and will continue to be at the root of Hip-hop culture, like that of any other major religion.¹ In fact, knowledge is the second most referenced word in the Holy Quran after Allah. And in Judaism, the Mosaic Law serves as a knowledgeable text that guides its followers into a deeper relationship with Yahweh much like the Beatitudes of Jesus Christ serves as knowledgeable instructions for “seeing God” (Matt. 5:8 NRSV). Therefore, the importance of knowledge into Hip-hop culture can serve as an excellent introduction to God—again, beyond entertainment—by engendering broader ecumenical discourses, or in my particular case, discussion about spirituality with people who may otherwise never have thought of God as the search for knowledge, wisdom and understanding.

¹ Isaura Betzabe Pulido, *Knowledge-The Fifth Element of Hip Hop Music: Mexican and Puerto Rican Youth Engagement of Hip Hop as Critically Rac(ed) Education Discourse* (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest, UMI Dissertation Publishing, 2011).

These gatherings, specifically those in my doctoral project, have challenged the normative views on both sacred spaces (i.e. Church) and spirituality because it has forced me to start asking the right questions: Who has the right to define sacred spaces or spirituality? Why can't Hip-hop be another spiritual path that leads to a relationship with the Divine? Why is Hip-hop important to you? How was Hip-hop introduced to you? How does Hip-hop provide purpose, if any, to your personal life? These questions I myself reflected on throughout my own life having been a part of the culture for over 23 years now. But was I alone in this quest for knowledge? I felt compelled to search for answers so I made the decision to incorporate these questions into my research for the purpose of starting a conversation about the spirituality of Hip-hop by interviewing youth, artist, scholars, ministers, parents, entrepreneurs and in the case of my doctoral project, Bronx residents between the ages of 18-24 (the largest consumers of Hip-hop music).

As part of my plan of implementation (see Appendix A), I assembled a team to help make this project a reality and for the purpose of involving the broader community. In this way, the project could be duplicated in the future by allowing those who were interested in re-creating it to produce it for their own purposes of empowerment. As such, included in the plan of implementation are research questions which are used to both guide and bring to life the connection between Hip-hop and spirituality. They include three in total: 1) Socio-historical 2) Spirituality/Theological and 3) Biblical (see Appendix A).

Simultaneously, ministerial competencies (see Appendix A), correlated with the expectations of the project by pushing me to advance certain ministerial characteristics

that are necessary to excel in this project particularly as a faith-rooted organizer—my doctoral tract. And so, faith-rooted organizing, spiritual leader and pastor were three ministerial competencies that my site team identified as areas I needed to improve.

My site team was made up of a group of professionals whom I selected to oversee the project based on their professional backgrounds (see Appendix A). Because of their wisdom, respective gifts, and resources, I was able to apply a multi-disciplinary approach to my nine month research and project application.

The responses that I received were altogether phenomenal. I will touch more on these findings in subsequent chapters. But for now, it's important to know that through implementing small group dialogues, reflection papers, public events, surveys and personal interviews, I was able to draw up two conclusions: I am not alone, and Hip-hop culture doesn't need the Church or any other form of religion for that matter to feel connected to a Higher Infinite Power, as Hip-hop *is* spiritual.

Through this research project I, through the help and support of my site team, for the first time ever, have been able to document Hip-hop cultures spiritual trajectory. Nothing currently exists that collectively captures Hip-hop culture's spiritual presence other than books of personal testimonies and philosophies. I also want to be very clear that I am not intending to solidify my Christian theology through these spiritual discourses. That is to say, this is not limited or to be interpreted as being Christian Hip-hop or Holy Hip-hop. While I hold my beliefs and practices in my own heart, I do not exclude others from their beliefs and I believe neither would Jesus, especially Hip-hop. We are talking about spirituality, a term that is inclusive, free and universal to all religions, including non-believers.

This understanding comes from realizing the changing times in which we are living. With the technology growing everyday along with the globalization of our world, church is becoming replaced with TED talks while theology is being challenged by spoken word videos posted by youth on YouTube. Therefore, creating a multi-sensory experience for our research participants was important in light of the low attention span of our youth and the growing technological demands that must be met in order for us “elders” to survive in the 21st Century.

In having conversations with youth, young adults and elders, we have been able to compile information that proves Hip-hop’s spirituality by connecting generations of people together who have utilized it to empower themselves and others. That is to say, having a conversation between Hip-hoppers from the past with future Hip-hoppers in the present can provide us with the kind of information that can challenge the negative stereotypes associated with Hip-hop culture. In demonstrating its unifying capabilities through education and social events we are collectively altering Hip-hop history as opposed to making the assumption that I and my team are trying to save it. That is to say, in empowering each participant, they feel more involved in the process of Hip-hop’s transformation rather than a byproduct of it. This is extremely important to me when you consider the challenges that both Hip-hop culture and the world are currently facing today. After all, Hop culture is not an isolated phenomenon but a broader representation of this meta-narrative that consists of our world history and our own respective stories.

From a Hip-hop perspective, the culture continues to undergo much scrutiny due to corporations who are continuing to convey negative lyrics and images of rap music through radio and videos. This recycling of R.A.P. (Recording Artist Pretending)

undoubtedly plays a significant role in the mind, body and souls of individuals when used negatively. In other words, to deny the parallelism between rap music and our social ills (I am specifically referring to the location where I conducted my research, the Bronx, the birthplace of Hip-hop) would be to deny the majority of faces (Black and Brown) that are being affected by the prison industrial complex (see Appendix F), and abusive law enforcement.²

Much of my research has guided me into conversations with several people regarding the relationship between Hip-hop culture and mass incarceration. After all, Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*,³ serves as a great socio-historical text that makes the connection between the slavery of the past and the (new) slavery of today: prison. As such, the violent lyrical content that sometimes comes out of the mouths of Hip-hop artist—some would argue, including Dr. Gary Delgado of the Center for Third World Organizing (CTWO)—is the reason why many Black and Brown youth and young adults are being imprisoned at such alarming rates.

As part of my ministerial competencies, I attended a conference at Union Theological Seminary entitled, *Cell Block and Border Stops: Transformative Activism in an Age of Dehumanization*. This conference was intended to bring together various leaders, including those of various faiths, in order to come up with more practical methods of ending the war on drugs, a war which has been shown to be directly linked to our prison system.

² Robert Stolarik. "Stop and Frisk Policy – New York City Police Department," *New York Times*, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/s/stop_and_frisk/index.html (accessed October 18, 2012).

³ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010).

Naturally, I classified this training as part of my faith-rooted organizing skills because prison, drugs, and government abuse are the challenges that I as an organizer must confront when organizing the Hip-hop community. While I argue that not all Hip-hop lyrics makes references to drugs, street violence and crime, Dr. Gary Delgado, who himself is a Hip-hop artist and organizer, believes otherwise.

Part of the conference included breakout sessions which included his panel discussion entitled, *Arts, Culture and Resistance*, where he argues that Hip-hop ideology and its imagery of the hyper-masculinity of African-Americans and Latinos further adds to the surveillance of law enforcement creating a Hip-hop-to-prison pipeline (see Appendix F).

It is almost predictable how rap music can sway society, especially our young people, by influencing the way they talk, dress, act and react. But what most people do not understand is that while rap is something we do, Hip-hop culture is something we live. And if 2% of a culture is misconstrued and represented negatively, the other 98%, which is in fact the majority, becomes unknown. So if there is no Hip-hop education and dialogue taking place within and out of the culture then we will continue to mistreat it especially for those who are aspiring to be a part of it in one shape or form in the future.

From a broader social standpoint, the above concerns become more nuanced when you factor in the ongoing decline of numerous after school programs (specifically in the arts) in high schools in the Bronx and beyond. This becomes even more staggering when we take into consideration the ever decreasing youth and young adult presence and/or participation in communities of faith and ministry.⁴ In other words, the phenomenon of

⁴ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church - and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2011).

dying mainline churches continues to be a concern to the faithful who are also struggling to keep their buildings intact due to its dwindling parishioners. When you consider all of these factors it becomes increasingly important—now more than ever—that we consider alternative pathways of providing our youth with places to feed their souls.

But all of that is changing now because the world is changing. With the growth of the internet, technology and social media, our youth now have more access to information than at any other time in world history. Instead of resisting this change, we should embrace it by utilizing these mediums for the purposes of furthering their education, connecting them with other youth from other parts of the world, and most importantly, to empower them.

Because of Hip-hop culture's continuing global presence in juxtaposition with the changing of these times, a new way of interpreting spirituality and sacred spaces is underway. The internet and social media is allowing Hip-hop culture to spread faster to now include other groups from varying geographical locations and ideologies. It has now become even more multi-cultural, multi-faith, multi-ethnic, multi-disciplined, and multi-generational. And with all of these diverse perspectives and understandings coming together, it becomes that much easier to exchange identical ideas, discuss common injustices and to explore one's own spiritual connectedness.

With so much access to so much information, one needs to know how to articulate it in a non-judgmental and honest space so that they, our youth, can continue to come back to us. This is where Hip-hop culture is succeeding and where traditional places of faith are failing. As a lay minister working in various churches and faith-based organizations, I have seen, time after time, the disconnect and disinterest that exists

between youth and faith. Today, we continue to push our young people to the side; or worse, to the margins; be it physically, where we continue to prevent them from participating in the discourses that involve church life and ministry by making them wait outside of the discussion rooms; be it mentally, whenever we continue to embrace a pedagogy that disapproves of multiple interpretations and insists on just one; or, be it spiritually, where many churches or faith-based communities do not provide our young people with a safe and sacred space that helps to develop their own theological voices. However, through inclusivity via Hip-hop culture, using its mantra of peace, love, unity, and having fun—youth *are* continuing to come back and as a result they *are* creating their own spiritual imaginations.

What is coming to fruition is a world-wide remix that is providing countless human beings with the opportunity to find purpose in their own lives through raising their own consciousness while guiding their spiritual path. After all, it was Dr. James Cone who said it best at the outset of all of his theological courses: you must find your own voice!

As part of the Hip-hop educational requirements, all of my doctoral participants were asked to read my book, *Beyond the Four Walls: The Rising Ministry and Spirituality of Hip-hop*. I encourage everyone to read this book as it serves as a great reference for understanding the spirituality of Hip-hop even further. But for now, I want to close by quoting the writer of the epilogue section of my book, the great Reverend Osagyefu Sekou, who wrote, “Hip-hop does not *need* the salvation of the church; instead, Hip-hop just may be its greatest salvation.” Say word!

CHAPTER 1

H.I.P. - H.O.P!

Who or what is Hip-hop? Why is it important to our society? What significant contributions has it made to our world? These questions were important to my research, as it allowed me to contextualize this infant culture that has now become a global phenomenon. Most of my doctoral project participants would agree that beyond the music, Hip-hop is a way of life, a culture (see Appendix C). But unlike the traditional views of a culture, which typically classifies groups of people according to its history, food type and nationhood, Hip-hop culture goes beyond these normative cultural characteristics by utilizing its aesthetics as bridge builders between other cultures and nations.

For me, Hip-hop is more than an ideology or culture but a state of consciousness and being. If one truly claims to be Hip-hop (as I do) you do not view it as a subject, but as a verb. Ergo, describing your “Hip-hopness” is merely insufficient in comparison to its practical application. In other words, to understand Hip-hop culture one should study it thoroughly, practice it frequently and share it as much as possible with the community—that’s Hip-hop!

Hip-hop’s unyielding efforts toward inclusivity are unlike anything we’ve seen before in history, when you consider its presence in academia, entertainment, arts and in my specific case, spirituality. Much of this comes from its core principles of peace, love

unity and having fun. From these mantras comes the understanding that all human beings are created art forms of the Divine, which produces a multitude of artistic expressions from varying human experiences. Because of Hip-hop cultures' dominant art forms, or elements, of DJing, eMCeeing, B-boy/girl, graffiting and knowledge, the most humanistic side of ourselves becomes relived, re-imagined and reactivated as precious gifts given to us by the Creator—mind, body and soul.

And so, Hip-hop comes to us in the form of an acronym which means Higher Infinite Power Healing Our People. This understanding became popularized when eMCee, philosopher, and pioneer, KRS-ONE, wrote and produced a video for his song entitled, *Hip-hop Lives*.⁵

This well-versed rhyme outlined its significance in history by highlighting it as a movement, specifically as “an intelligence movement.” It further describes Hip-hop as being one of much spiritual healing over the years through its aesthetics and therefore served as an excellent image with which to begin a dialogue in my project.

However, the importance of this song in the mainstream arena was two-fold. First, KRS-ONE's reputation as an eMCee, philosopher and educator is worthy of much respect. And so, his attempt to inform the general public further adds to Hip-hop cultures preservation and metaphysical contributions. Secondly, and most importantly, my research has shown me that most of Hip-hop's stories of origin have traditionally been told from a negative perspective, due to the overwhelmingly damaging perception of the rap music industrial complex.

The negative perception of Hip-hop, however, has been promulgated by a corporate mandate that has supported images of misogyny and materialism. This

⁵ KRS-ONE, *Hip-hop Lives*, Hip-hop Lives 12”, Koch Records, 2007.

ideological shift, because of “Hip-hop vs. Rap music,” has severely damaged the integrity of Hip-hop from a cultural perspective thus contributing to its negative perceptions and being interpreted as another secular musical genre. The importance and potential for the rebuilding and redevelopment of decaying neighborhoods was replaced with platinum chains, while songs like “U.N.I.T.Y” by eMCee Queen Latifah were replaced with songs like “Five Star Chick” by Rapper Yo Gotti.

The packaging of Rap Music in this way has not only degraded the general public’s view of Hip-hop *culture*, but it continues to influence the impressionable attitudes, behaviors, and mindsets of its biggest consumer, our youth and young adults. The majority of Rap Music’s audience consists of our youth and college students, making them the primary target of corporations’ decision to utilize Rap as a tool for marketing sex, spreading negative lyrical content, and promoting material wealth in the name of Hip-hop. Consequently, Rap Music’s association with Hip-hop has done much to preserve a cyclical pattern of moral decay as it continues to be fueled by a particular type of artist and song(s), while filtering out all of the good that exists within Hip-hop culture.

Yes, Hip-hop culture came from the inner city, and like any other inner-city environment, it underwent moments of sociological and political struggles. This gave way to a counter-culture dominated by waves of gentrification, law enforcement abuse⁶ and the eradication of after school programs. It is a breeding ground for rebellious language, visuals and information. But it does not and should not end there because the minority does not represent the majority. What most people fail to understand is that when Hip-hop was being formed under those difficult conditions, a celebratory revolution

⁶ Marilyn S. Johnson, *Justice: A History of Police Violence in New York City* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

of resistance was also taking place. So when we take the time to understand Hip-hop from that critical lens, we begin to have more robust conversations about what it is, who is it for and why it is here.

Thus we began our first plan of implementation (see Appendix A), with the inclusion of the various voices of Hip-hop culture beginning with its pioneers. In understanding who they are we understand who Hip-hop is, thus mapping out our history. Furthermore, we sought to include the voices of not just Hip-hop's pioneers, but of eye witnesses present when Hip-hop was being created—and recreated.

Afrika Bambaataa, the “god father of Hip-hop” and founder of the Universal Zulu Nation,⁷ became successful in his attempt to bring all of New York City's gang members together non-violently in 1973. Afrika Bambaataa, the leader of the most notorious gang at that time, the Black Spades, brought together all of the elements of Hip-hop culture only to end all rival gang violence practically overnight after an inspirational trip to the motherland of Africa. As a result, gang members turned away fighting for rhyme battles while knives and bats were replaced with aerosol spray cans to create art that symbolized socio-political resistance. What was once the stomping ground for multiple fights over street territories and power has now become replaced with communities of transformation and empowerment. This tradition remains true even today, where we find those same members of the Universal Zulu Nation from the 1970's still teaching and empowering in the Bronx today. For example, Kev Ski, Zulu leader, teaches break dancing and graffiti to kids at a Church in the Bronx. Zulu King, Lava, teaches workshops to youth from all over the New York City area and beyond.

⁷ Afrika Bambaataa, “The History of the Universal Zulu Nation,” YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vq1ONZ7R6IQ> (accessed on October 19, 2012).

Not too far away from this location in the Bronx was a Jamaican-born brother by the name of Kool DJ Herc throwing the first ever Hip-hop party to the community. But this was not your typical block party because those in attendance were charged an admissions fee to help support Kool DJ Herc's sister, Cindy Campbell, to raise money to purchase school materials. This party, like Afrika Bambaataa's gang gathering, was a complimentary attempt in bringing the community together by intentionally providing economic empowerment to not only his sister but to future DJ's as well. What Kool DJ Herc did not realize was that he developed *the* blueprint for the art of DJing, a skill that is not only found all over the world but is now a source of steady income for countless individuals.

The vision that these pioneers had for each other and their respective community's has inspired others to do the same but in varying artistic facets. While individually creating and developing the elements of Hip-hop, they were collectively and organically changing the course of history. This is the untold story of Hip-hop culture that is not shared with our youth. This re-education became a large part of the doctoral project process. In this way, we are better able to connect the reasoning behind our pioneer's vision with that of our own culture and our own purpose.

In addition to reading my book, *Beyond the Four Walls: The Rising Ministry and Spirituality of Hip-hop*, each of my doctoral participants were required to partake in a series of educational trainings on Hip-hop's culture and history by involving them in dialogues, reflections, and events. This first took place on February 23, 2013 at El Fagon Center for the Arts in the Bronx—my primary location for research (see Appendix B).

This first gathering was with members of my project team called “the project team” (see Appendix B). This group consisted of five randomly selected people whose purpose is to support in the development of this project all the while being transformed themselves much like the intentions of my targeted audience called “the focus group” (see Appendix C). The focus group consisted of two separate but similar gatherings of five for a total of ten participants who are Bronx residents between the ages of 18-24. Unfortunately, about half of the participants from the focus group dropped out, along with two of our five project team participants, for reasons beyond our control. Those that did continue with the project, however, provided us with a tremendous amount of information to support my theory.

The former gave strong opinions about their understanding of Hip-hop culture as relates to their personal experiences as participants and/or observers. Most, including members of the focus group, were not thoroughly schooled on Hip-hop’s history yet were familiar with its elements and sense of purpose. But interestingly enough most could not find the right language or words to describe the purpose in full detail. This was especially prevalent when I proposed the idea of it being a vehicle for both individual and social spiritual empowerment.

To begin a conversation about Hip-hop culture and spirituality one must invite our elders into this conversation. Now that Hip-hop is multigenerational we have an opportunity to connect our youth with our elders because they too come from where they come from, dress like they dress and talk the way they talk only they are much wiser and experienced. This in turn puts them in a position of serving as role models and mentors by filling in these historical—and verbal—voids that exist in Hip-hop culture. This was

particularly important for our focus group members, with our youngest participant being 19 years of age.

This young African-American male is an inspiring Hip-hop artist who has expressed to the group his feeling of Hip-hop being “something much more” than he originally thought but he could never find the right words to express it or artistically show it. I’ve encountered many of our participants throughout this project, including those that attended our March 23, 2013 gathering (a public event we put together which will be discussed in much greater detail in subsequent chapters) who have expressed to me a similar sentiment where the “right words” and in some instances, the “right people,” have become hard to find and share it with. I had a feeling this would come up at some point throughout this project so I included a short montage video that highlighted the significance of Hip-hop as a social spiritual movement. We collected multiple video clips of artists such as MC Lyte and scholars such as Dr. Cornel West, who used the right language to help begin a conversation about Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment. These images spoke to Hip-hop’s continuing legacy of resistance by including a variety of voices from the broader Hip-hop community.

This ten minute video allowed me to produce the multi-sensory experience that was necessary to incorporate into this project. Most of our participants were not familiar with these short video clips but nevertheless were able to recognize most of the people who were being interviewed. The video also included some clips of the Bronx during Hip-hop's creation in the 1970s. Since most of our participants, both the focus group and the project team, were from the Bronx, many were familiar with the sociological challenges already.

From there we were able to start a conversation about how those conditions influenced spiritual principles and ideas from the older generation, and how those principles and ideas were in relationship with what this younger generation is or is not doing now. Some began to re-think about Hip-hop's purpose in a different light as they had never heard this side of the story.

One participant, a young Latina woman studying at a community college, recalled first hearing Hip-hop in the only English-speaking radio station in town from her native country of the Dominican Republic. She further contributed by reminiscing about the parties and new dances that came out as a result of listening to Hip-hop artist such as 50 Cent. Beyond that, she knew nothing of its culture and therefore only associated it with entertainment. Interesting enough, most of our participants, were themselves first introduced to Hip-hop culture through its musical element and it wasn't only until later in life did they decide to explore its other elements.

Another participant shared that his introduction to Hip-hop came from the artist 2Pac, whom he believed spoke to the challenges of all ghetto youth. It was not until his involvement in street protest that he associated the other elements of Hip-hop culture as part of Hip-hop. He began to see how graffiti served as imagery for political expression while break dancing could be used for drawing people first then capturing that moment to talk to them about such things as police brutality and gang violence.

Unlike the focus group, where I was only one generation ahead of them, that was not the case for the project team members. This gathering by far was the most robust, transformative and dense of all the gatherings that took place. The diversity stemmed from young thirty-year-old male Hip-hop artists to single African-American mothers. We

also had a music producer and a young woman who had just moved to New York City from the West Coast. Because of their age and their primary role as supporters of the project, I did not take the same approach in using media (i.e. the montage) to begin our dialogue together. Instead, I invited prominent speakers and Hip-hop elders to join us.

Minister Server Tavares and Reverend Osagyefu Sekou were both invited to be a part of this first piece of this project. Both of these men I admire because of their unyielding contributions and advocacy toward the Hip-hop culture. Minister Server is the founder of Hip-hop Ministries Inc. and also a member of the Universal Zulu Nation.

I met Minister Server over the internet and we connected instantly. Although a practicing Christian and ordained minister, Minister Server believes in many spiritual paths that lead to the one greater God who goes by many spiritual names. Because of his way of thinking, it was only natural that I was invited soon afterwards to Atlanta, Georgia—where he resides—to speak at his radio station WRFG 89.3FM.

The conversation between Minister Server, who is almost twice my age, and I already represented an inter-generational dialogue. Our conversation over the radio was important for the ear of Atlanta because much of the sound (i.e. bounce music) that is produced now in rap comes from this area. So it was only natural that I invited Minister Server to participate in an extensive conversation with our project participants to hear other voices and opinions.

Another reason Minister Server was important to this process was because he continues to be an advocate of the May 2011 adoption of the Hip-hop Declaration of Peace to the United Nations (see Appendix I). This assembly of 300 Hip-hoppers proved

Hip-hop's unifying spirit for the purposes of utilizing it for international peace and reconciliation. This diverse gathering in the United Nations showed the world that:

“The Hip-hop community exists as an international culture of consciousness that provides all races, tribes, religions and styles of people a foundation for the communication of their best ideas and works. Hip-hop Culture is united as one multi-skilled, multi-cultural, multi-faith, multi-racial people committed to the establishment and the development of peace” (see Appendix I).

This document can kick-start a change in the negative perception of Hip-hop culture because no other genre has made a similar attempt in the past. It also serves as a concrete example of Hip-hop's contribution to our broader society, having now included everyone across the globe.

Surprisingly enough, most of our participants were aware of this information but were not aware of the countless hours of work required to create it. Today, any true Hip-hopper would know of this document; it serves as a great educational tool because it teaches us cohesiveness, inclusivity, non-violence and spirituality. Minister Server spoke at length of the language that was used in the creation of this document, but more importantly, he emphasized the need to create an inclusive referendum that both challenges the negative stereotypes of Hip-hop and unifies Hip-hoppers from all over the world—especially our youth.

Although Minister Server Tavares is himself a practicing Christian, he made it clear that he is Hip-hop first and foremost. Therefore, he does not refute the voices of other faiths, because according to Minister Server, Hip-hop represents everything and everyone.

Reverend Osagyefu Sekou is a theologian and ordained minister of the First Baptist Church of Jamaica Plains, in Massachusetts. I met Reverend Sekou while studying at Union Theological Seminary where we connected and have maintained a

relationship ever since. He is also a very well respected faith-rooted organizer, having been involved with other faiths and clergy to organize campaigns over fair wages and criminal justice initiatives. His reputation as a dynamic organizer, speaker and most importantly, Hip-hop lover, were the reason I selected him to be a part of this project. He served, therefore, as an excellent resource for the development of my ministerial competencies (see Appendix A).

Faith-rooted organizing is the specific track that I am focusing on for the Doctorate of Ministry program at New York Theological Seminary. I define a faith-rooted organizer in the context of Hip-hop as: someone that engages in community organizing with a focus on the civic engagement, spiritual growth, and scriptural relevancy that is found in mobilizing Hip-hoppers to do the work of justice. I made sure that my co-facilitator, Philip Lynn, understood this concept as a special guest for our first gathering with the project team.

Philip Lynn is the founder of the small group ministries at the Riverside Church. The small group ministries serve as a small sacred space for groups to come together and explore their spirituality. I attended one of these sessions and found them to be extremely helpful in building community and enhancing my theological voice. Because of Philip Lynn's ability to push people to probe their thoughts further as a life coach, I asked him to help me engage our participants during our small gathering. He became an excellent tool as both a professional and lay minister due to his soothing voice, interest in Hip-hop as a ministry and his gift in maintaining a dialogue amongst strangers.

Philip Lynn, Minister Server Tavares, and Reverend Sekou served as a great introduction to Hip-hop culture. In particular, the experiences of both ordained ministers

served as exemplars in faith-rooted organizing in Hip-hop culture. Because my particular project focused on the spirituality of Hip-hop and not the Christianity of Hip-hop, faith-rooted organizing served as the perfect fit, as Hip-hop reflects a multi-faith ethnography. In fact, Hip-hop culture is a great ecumenical platform that can be used to bring fourth all faiths together to explore the multiple dimensions of the Divine. Through these explorations participants are able to find common struggles (i.e. police brutality), despite our differences in faith—that is faith-rooted organizing and that is Hip-hop!

Reverend Sekou, therefore, was a perfect fit for this discussion because he himself has experiences in faith-rooted organizing. He has marched in protest of civil liberties alongside prominent figures like Dr. Cornel West, and has also played an active role in the New York City Living Wage Campaign, which consist of clergy from various faiths who collectively have succeeded in providing a livable wage for low-income citizens of New York City (see Appendix F). Additionally, Rev. Sekou's first published book entitled, *Urban Souls*, earned him his spot in the Hip-hop community by creating a narrative that looked at Hip-hop culture as a calling for urban dwellers to do some soul searching.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that Rev. Sekou made it very clear in his opening remarks that he has no hope for Hip-hop as a potential platform for social transformation. He stated to the group that since Hip-hop is leaderless it has yet to show the world its contribution to creating prophetic voices of impactful social change. He went on to say that there have been attempts in the past to try to organize Hip-hop communities into becoming politically engaged, but they have failed. While he recognizes the efforts that are being made on a local level he sees the national agenda as

hopeless. He concludes by saying that despite the pessimistic overtone he remains hopeful for the future.

This brings us back to the questions I posed earlier – What is Hip-hop’s significance and contributions to our society and world at large? Much of this will be discussed in chapter 3, but for now I want us to revert back to KRS-ONE’s song, *Hip-hop Lives*. Again, KRS-ONE refers to Hip-hop as an intelligent movement, and I concur. Still, throughout my dissertation I’ve used the term “social spiritual movement” to describe what I see Hip-hop culture to be.

Since its inception, Hip-hop has presented itself to me and countless youth and young adults—including our project participants—as what I like to call a “spiritual therapy” for marginalized people living in divested spaces. This kind of spiritual gathering has been found present throughout our history.

For example, the musical genre of Blues was used by African-Americans to cope with slavery during colonial times—Dr. James Cone, the founder of Black Theology, articulates this eloquently in his book, *The Spiritual and the Blues*.⁸ Another example can be found in the Judeo-Christian Bible where we find songs of survival and spiritual connectedness in the Book of Lamentations as a direct response to the occupation by the Babylonian Empire.

Today, that “spiritual baton”—if you will—has been passed and circulated throughout our history and now flows, or Hip-hops, in the mouths and actions of young men and women as a means to survive, cope, flourish, and change their own lives and respective communities. This self-expression by way of Hip-hop innovation creates a safe, sacred, and socially critical space that allows its participants to reflect on their lives,

⁸ James Cone, *The Spiritual and the Blues* (New York: Orbis Books, 1972).

and opens new ways of thinking and being, while fostering an individual identity that stands out “in itself” yet parallels their broader social context.

A social spiritual movement therefore can be viewed as a historical happening that alters the consciousness, body, and spirit of countless human beings by activating their awareness of ‘self’ while motivating them to serve. The spirituality of Hip-hop will be discussed in much detail in chapter 2, but for now, it is important to know that it is the spirituality of the movement that pushes its participants into finding meaning and purpose in their own lives by getting lost in its attempt to bring peace, love, unity, and having fun into this world.

Social spiritual movements are born in communities of pain with harsh injustices that put people in a position to question the existence of the Creator in light of their particular social context. This is why it was important that our participants both study and understand the contributions of Hip-hop pioneers Kool DJ Herc and Afrika Bambaataa in order to understand Hip-hop's spiritual beginnings. These beginnings were crucial because once they made their leadership skills visible to the community they helped sparked the spiritual fire that was necessary in blossoming a flower of hope that would come from the cracks of these streets. I think the following examples will provide us with further clarity.

When I think about a social spiritual movement, I am imagining Moses moving the crowd into freedom from bondage. To think that an oppressed people that were living in Egypt can overcome what appeared to be a never-ending struggle resulted in the changing of the hearts and minds of millions.

Ancient Israelites were living under the oppression of the Egyptian empire as slaves. Moses was called by “I Am” (Ex.3:14 NRSV) to free his people. He spoke up against the pharaoh asking that he let his people go, much like faith-rooted organizers are called to speak to power today. I think about Jesus participating in the same tradition, moving the crowd as he spoke of justice, compassion, knowledge, and love.

Jesus Christ exemplified true defiance of the status quo by constantly challenging everyone he met via his words and actions. Jesus gave public testimony after testimony of how we as humans are given the same divine power to save ourselves and in doing so he influenced millions. But what made Jesus Christ stand out the most was his ability to communicate to the masses, especially those that were suffering. He understood that his role was that of a physician because “it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.” (Mk. 2:17 NRSV). That is to say, Jesus’ ministry was that of marginalized communities who are seeking to be spiritually charged in a dying spiritual world.

And I will even fast forward to the recent 50 Year Anniversary of brother Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr. reading his iconic “I have a dream” speech. This oration served to amplify words of justice, equality, love, and economic rights—moving the crowd to inspire millions to voice their opinions by putting their faith into action.

Similar to Moses and Jesus, Dr. King lived in a time of much civil unrest and social injustice. Because racism, low employment, and government abuse was running rampant in the United States, Dr. King brought hope and a spiritual resurgence through his various speeches and demonstrations. It was because of his courage that countless

minds and hearts of marginalized communities found voices to also speak out and take action to end inequality forever.

Hip-hop is no different from this short but credible list of crowd movers (eMCee means Move the Crowd). Moreover, Hip-hop compliments this social spiritual endeavor by producing millions of followers like me who are continuing its legacy through the transformation of their own respective communities. My travels certainly have shown this to be true, which is why when speaking to our project participants I made sure to acknowledge the global social spiritual movements that are taking place. That is to say, to be part of the social spiritual lineage, a movement must have global implications.

In the country of France, for example, Hip-hop music and culture has been appropriated by African and Arab teens to describe the political and economic disenfranchisement that they face on an almost daily basis—not to mention the ongoing racism they encounter in the various housing projects that exist in and around the city of Paris. My time in France has shown me Hip-hop's strong potential for organizing protests while providing voices to isolated communities.

Another example can be found in the country of South Africa, where the largest form of Hip-hop is called Kwaito.⁹ Kwaito, which has had a growth similar to the Hip-hop movement in the United States, is a direct reflection of the post-apartheid movement in South Africa and is therefore being used as a voice for the voiceless.

In Colombia I've encountered youth from the Cultural House Organization in Medellin which utilizes Hip-hop culture as a method of placing young people in leadership roles in their communities. In January of 2009, I traveled to Colombia in order

⁹ Dipannita Basu, Sidney Lemelle, and Robin Kelley, *Vinyl Ain't Final: Hip-hop and the Globalisation of Black Popular Culture* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Pluto Press, 2006).

to study Peace Culture and Peace Movement with a group of my colleagues from Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University alongside Professor Chung Hyun Kyung, an Associate Professor of Ecumenical Studies, and Amada Benavides, Director of the School of Peace in Medellín and Bogotá, Colombia.

Throughout our two weeks spent there, we met with various individuals and organizations that are committed to the implementation and preservation of peace culture and peace education in Colombia. This immersion course exposed me (and my colleagues) to a beautiful country whose history not only consists of armed struggle, government corruption, racism, internal displacement (as a result of land disputes), gangs, and a myriad of other social disorders, but also a country that has embraced a culture of peace, education, hope, community organizing, justice, faith, love, and spiritual care.

When I interviewed some of the youth at the Cultural House Organization, they shared with me stories of how guerilla armies recruit young people to transport guns and drugs to help fundraise their political agendas. As an alternative, youth put together multiple events in their center and in street corners to inform the general public of the dangers associated with these rebel armies.

During these performances, Hip-hoppers pass out propaganda regarding the benefits of learning Hip-hop culture (e.g. eMCeeing teaches oratory skills and graffiti teaches art) which then provides them with a supportive community, networking, and a political referendum. These liberal arts tools allow for a new and inspiring avenue of expression for the youth, but one of the most important things I see Hip-hop doing is binding ethnic groups together, as Alejandro aka Alejo, a young eMCee, mentioned.

When you consider that Afro-Colombians make up 60% of the population in the city of Choco and that 23% of all Colombians are indigenous, race relations becomes a vital component of Colombian culture.¹⁰

However, the significance of these budding alliances appears at times to be more opportunistic, considering the distrust projected by the paramilitaries, guerillas, the government, and the civil police toward the general public. Because racism is such a problem in Colombia, institutions like the Cultural House Organization in Medellin have become popular places of sanctuary for young mestizo men like Alejandro. The Cultural House in Medellin not only became a place where he could “spit those rhymes,” but also a place where he felt called to a unified, peaceful cause, as opposed to the division propagated between armed militia groups.

The words of protest and emotion that come from the mouths of these youth is more than enough to assemble a plethora of eMCees who can relate to the reality of life in Colombia and who have a similar goal: to change it. As stated by Colombian politician Piedad Esneda Córdoba Ruiz, it will be the youth of Colombia who will liberate this beautiful country. Because of Colombia’s diverse population—Black, White and indigenous—it also creates inclusivity in what can sometimes feel like a very racist country.¹¹

In the United States specifically, Hip-hop has been very involved in social spiritual engagement as well. Much of this will be discussed in Chapter 3, but by way of example, the 2004 and 2006 National Hip-hop Conventions served as vice presidential and presidential candidacies for the 2008 race led by Jared Ball and Rosa Clemente. The

¹⁰ Frank Palacios and Marco Palacios, *Colombia: Fragmented Land, Divide Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹¹ Ibid.

Hip-hop conventions provided political agendas on behalf of the Hip-hop community. Topics such as education, immigration, health, and criminal justice were part of the program. This was extremely important to solidify Hip-hop culture as a social spiritual movement because words become useless unless they are put into action. Additionally, this national gathering was an extension of the aforementioned Hip-hop Declaration of Peace which has resulted in countless conflict resolutions both domestically and internationally.

These attempts for political involvement inspired Hip-hop culture's first ambassador, Miss Toni Blackman, to take the political agenda on a global scale. Finally, from a spiritual perspective, Hip-hop has provided countless safe spaces for theological discourses and youth empowerment in places like Chicago, where you can find an organization by the name of Da House where scholarships are given out to graduating seniors under the leadership of Pastor Phil Jackson.

The West Side of Chicago, where Da House is situated, has historically undergone the same social hostilities that any other urban environment encountered during the growth of Hip-hop culture: police misconduct, gangs, drugs, poverty, high prison rates, and high school dropout rates, resulting in a lower quality of life experience. Because of these conditions, Da House not only attracts about five hundred youth every week, but it is also the first of its kind in Chicago.

Under the supervision of Pastor Phil Jackson, youth from Chicago, and from all over the United States, have either joined or visited this spiritual place of Hip-hop culture by exploring its rhyming, DJing, break dancing, graffiti and spoken word. For the average person looking inside out, Da House is nothing more than a Hip-hop concert.

But when you take the time to see how youth are embracing Hip-hop culture as a tool for performing important youth ministry work, you will see Da House as being more than just its four walls and music: a spiritual incubator.

These examples not only serve as educational tools that can add to the broader spiritual discourses that currently exist in the Hip-hop community, but they serve as reminders of Hip-hop's ability to avoid reinventing the wheel because, as eMCee legend Grandmaster Caz puts it, “Hip-hop did not invent anything, but it recreated everything.” In the same way that I experienced spirituality during the most challenging times in my life (see introduction), Hip-hop is also on a quest to find itself by not separating each social action and instead seeing them as many parts that make-up the whole of its movement. Like the DJ mixing a variety of sounds, Hip-hop blends and remixes ideas, engagements, and spiritualities in such a way that it creates an organic symphony that empowers communities to seek something more.

Hip-hop serves as a reminder to us all that art means nothing without bringing it to life in the real world. Although education served as the beginning of a transformative experience via this project it certainly was not its conclusion. The second step was the actual doing and creation of Hip-hop culture. To understand what it is and why it is important one need not just study it, but create it!

As the song *Hip-hop Lives* by KRS-ONE suggests, “You can’t just observe Hip-hop you gotta hop up and do it!” It is in the actual doing that we truly become Hip-hop and truly understand its significance and contribution to our broader society. The historical legacy of these spiritual leaders—Moses, Jesus, Dr. King—lives on through Hip-hop culture in its ongoing pursuit of the civic engagement of “the least of these” who

stand in defiance of the status quo and who find comfort in Hip-hop's unyielding capacity to heal spiritual wounds. Now *that* is Hip-hop!

CHAPTER 2

SPIRITUALITY

On October 15, 2012, the Star Tribune released an article chronicling the fact that 20% of the adult population in the United States (that's 46 million people) has no religious affiliation, including many who have decided to reject their faith altogether.¹² This disturbing statistic left me dumbfounded, not because people were making the decision to leave religion *per se*, but because there appeared to be a huge feeling of hopelessness toward our spaces of faith. It appears that an ominous cloud continues to hover over mainstream Christianity—as well as other major religions—due to the ever increasing concern over the dying mainline faith phenomenon.

On October 21, 2013—one year later—I was invited to speak at a conference entitled *To the Ends of the Earth: Models of Mission in the 21st Century* at New York Theological Seminary to discuss a similar topic. The purpose of this conference was to explore practical methods of evangelizing in the 21st Century (see Appendix H).

What made this conference particularly interesting was that all of the speakers were in their early-to-mid-thirties, and half of the presenters referenced Hip-hop as a method of ministry and pedagogy. But what caught my attention the most was the Rev. Charlene Han Powell of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York City's presentation regarding the Millennial population—to which I belong.

¹² Rose French, "Fastest Growing Group in Religious Circles? The 'Nones,'" *StarTribune*, 15 October 2012, accessed October 17, 2012, <http://www.startribune.com/174127941.html>.

This group, the Millennials, is those born approximately between the early 1980s and the early 2000s. Ironically, a large portion of the Millennial population includes those who have decided to leave mainline churches altogether. They are instead choosing spirituality over religion, commitment over casual participation, and vitality over the status quo. I had never categorized myself as a Millennial up until that point, yet I found this conference to be as important to my research findings as it was to my own spiritual development.

The Church—as well as other places of faith—is where we seek to encounter spirituality through tradition and theological findings. I myself am a product of the Church, having been baptized, confirmed, and having worked in various capacities as a lay leader. I have worked as a youth minister primarily but also have served in other capacities including curriculum development, religious education, and lay leadership. All of this work was inspired by my mother and grandmother whom I consider to be the reason I believe in God in the first place. They are what some would call spiritual warriors because their work in the church only represented half of their faith while the other was done through countless praying and meditation.

Their faith in me inspired me to stay committed in the work of ministry because I wanted to reach that level of spiritual maturity. Because of their unyielding commitment to the Church, I maintained my relationship with the church in one way or another. If the church was able to provide that kind of discipline and love than I would continue to provide my energy to it to assure that one day it will be reciprocated to my daughter, and our youth.

But the church, like the rest of the world, is changing, much like the increase in technology is booming. Therefore, old-school methods of doing ministry combined with low budgets for youth programs can create a recipe for disaster. Part of my frustration in working in youth ministry specifically has been in the low priorities that have been given to our youth attending church. Too much of the focus has been put on adult ministry and social justice initiatives that we leave our youth behind only to pick them up when we need them again—i.e. youth services and Christmas pageants.

Furthermore, I myself have experienced backlash for my “radical ideas” whenever approaching my superiors about using Hip-hop for religious educational purposes. As such, alternative methods of spiritual exploration need to be implemented and they should include the voices of our young people. My doctoral research has shown that Hip-hop culture can provide such a platform for our youth by creating spaces that are re-imagining spirituality in an empowering way.

Dr. Dale Irvin, President of New York Theological Seminary, gave an amazing closing speech at the conference I mentioned earlier. He said that we are living in a “Post-Church Age” where we are finding communities here in the United States that are not identifying as churches yet are meeting in small groups to worship in private homes, for example. In other parts of the world, such as India, we are seeing a growing number of communities who are calling themselves “churchless Christians.” In China there are those who refer to themselves as “cultural Christians,” having accepted the idea that spirituality and culture are mutually inclusive and therefore should be a part of one’s faith journey.

These various groups with their respective interpretations of church within Christianity remind me of how the original churches used to be when they were first formed in antiquity. That is to say, while these unorthodox gatherings may challenge the traditional views of Christianity and religion, they are actually returning us back to the way church used to be.

In 2009, Rev. Dr. Hal Taussing, a professor at Union Theological Seminary, released a book that challenged the normative views of church and its function. In his book, *In The Beginning was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity*, Dr. Taussing discusses how the first churches of antiquity consisted primarily of small marginalized communities who would gather to socialize about matters that ranged from politics to faith to social justice.

During these small gatherings, a meal was served to remind us that even Jesus broke bread with his friends (i.e. disciples). This, in turn, fostered a community with no established hierarchy other than the Divine placed at the head of our lives.

Despite the differences—whether ethnic, economic, and/or social—the church remains relevant all over the world today. The reason being that the church understands that it consists of more than orthodoxy, hierarchical systems, and physical structures; the church consists of, above all else, fulfilling its ministerial duties through public servitude, companionship and social services. Not just to its current congregants, but toward its prospective ones; especially those who have been left in the margins of society—youth in particular. After all, Professor Roger Haight said it best when he stated that:

“The church can never be without the ministries it needs to pursue its mission. Ministry is not something that is added onto the community in history. The church *is* its ministry; the church is ministry in action.”¹³

It was this same ambition, or spirit, that allowed Paul the Apostle to act and subsequently establish multiple churches in and around the Mediterranean Sea. After all, ministries mean nothing if the church does not activate them, or more importantly, if they are not able to make the correlation between faith and action.

But with the current decline in church participation one might think that God might be telling us to come back to these “old school” models of experiencing church or spirituality. It is for this reason that I chose to develop my spiritual leadership as a lay minister in addition to being part of my ministerial competencies. I define a spiritual leader as someone that is constantly developing their own spirituality through practice, service, and reflection so that they in turn can transform communities into spiritual ones. One of the ways I decided to develop this skill was by attending a spiritual retreat at the Riverside Church in New York City entitled *10 Spiritual Practices of Christianity*.

This one-day retreat, which echoed many of the lessons I received in Kabbalah over the summer, taught me to seek to build a church or faith community that is “an inclusive community that rejects no one and upholds the infinite value of each soul” (see Appendix G). Its focus was to look at a progressive Jesus who had a community of equals who affirmed each other's diversity and who saw each member as a minister with unique God-given purposes. It required those who attended to re-examine themselves by seeing every person as God sees them. I really enjoyed this retreat because it looked at

¹³ Haight, Roger. *Christian Community in History: Volume 1, Historical Ecclesiology* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2004).

Church from an egalitarian lens by advocating each other's spiritual lives and gifts equally.

Much of this retreat reflected my approach to doing ministry because the retreat facilitator, Rev. Farr, saw the work of Jesus as one of servitude to others, a way to connect with other people's faiths, and to view God as more inclusive. Additionally, servitude expanded the idea that our spiritual journey is always being focused outwardly as much as inwardly. For example, this retreat required us to bring an inanimate object that holds spiritual significance in our lives. In this way, when we broke up into our smaller groups we were able to share the meaning behind the object for the purposes of starting a conversation with complete strangers.

Doing ministry in this way generated dense dialogues concerning the spirituality of oneself, which transformed me altogether—and in return, transformed our participants. To talk about Hip-hop forming a spiritual experience we must look at it beyond its artistic expression and make room for the community to be heard. This was part of the definition of the progressive Christian in that everyone and everything is our teacher. If we understand Church from the context of its Greek word, *ekklesia*, which translates to mean a community gathering and assembly of the people, then we should acknowledge Hip-hop's gatherings to be moments of spiritual development and sanctity as well—after all, it is a sacred space!

The intersection of sacred space and spirituality sits at the core of this project. In acknowledging the spirituality found in the culture and in the art, we begin to transform the thinking of its creators. If the basic premise of this project is to raise one's consciousness regarding Hip-hop's ability to transform, one needs to first look at the

definition of spirituality. Posing this question to our participants is crucial because this is how we begin to archive Hip-hop's spiritual trajectory. Many of their own stories, or testimonies, exemplified the Rev. Dr. Roger Haight's definition of spirituality by incorporating their social reality into their personal narratives.¹⁴

Ideally, whenever an opportunity for individual exchange arises, human subjectivity flourishes when it is capable of enduring a tension between opposites. According to Dr. Ann Ulanov, a professor of religion and psychology, we become alive when we can connect our lived emotional reality with external reality, in such a way that our feelings, thoughts, and behaviors do not deny the reality of other people, but can enter into dialogue with them.¹⁵ Opening up a dialogue during my project gatherings concerning the realities of the participants allowed them to reflect more deeply about the choices they could make to lead their lives in accord with their ultimate concern. By noting the behaviors (such as gang involvement, fighting, illicit activity) that would get in the way of living life according to their ultimate concern, the youth were more receptive and better able to make use of the conflict resolution strategies that are addressed in the Declaration of Peace, for example, and subsequently resist the temptations of street life and or producing negative rap music.

By exploring similar themes through the positive lyrics found in Hip hop music, we amplified the emotional force of these realities and created new spaces for dialogue. These spaces empowered our groups to connect their individual experiences with a more transcendent reality, to feel part of a greater whole, and give voice to unarticulated

¹⁴ Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History: Volume 1, Historical Ecclesiology* (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group, Inc., 2004).

¹⁵ Ann Ulanov, *Finding Space: Winnicott, God, and Psychic Reality* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

thoughts and feelings. With so many studies being done on the relationship between psychology and spirituality, it was important for me to broaden my spiritual understanding by looking at these Hip-hop gatherings through a pastoral lens—a necessary skill whenever one is engaged in faith-rooted organizing.

Because Hip-hop culture encourages self expression through its aesthetics, the stage can be viewed as a therapy session. The decision to take Dr. Insook Lee's Introduction to Pastoral Care and Counseling was critical to this project because it prepared me to play the role of a care provider whenever necessary (see Appendix H).

For example, one of our participants left the doctoral project because she experienced an unexpected surprise—being a first time mom. This news was overwhelming for her and as a result she dropped out of the project. While I was disappointed in her decision to leave, I took advantage of the opportunity to provide pastoral care to someone who was dealing with a life changing event by reminding myself that this is part of the project—this is the spiritual journey.

This interdisciplinary approach has made me rethink about the influences that Hip-hop culture has in developing familial-communal systems that are aligned with the family systems theory of homeostasis. Homeostasis is an emotional system and transference that exists as a function of family dynamics.¹⁶ This interdependency of emotions fosters community where the environment, or external reality, offers opportunities for connectedness and relation. The same could be said about loss and grief, illness and death, family violence and when developing caring relationships. This

¹⁶Roberta Gilbert, *The Eight Concepts of Bowen Theory: A New Way of Thinking about the Individual and the Group* (Falls Church: Leading Systems, 2006).

pastoral care course changed my outlook on pastoral work because it taught me how to listen well and to provide the proper care based on the need of the care-receiver.

Because most of the students in this class were pastors, the discussions that ensued regarding pastoral intimacy and emotional balance were of great concern, especially where working with youth was involved. Because boundaries are an important necessity in doing ministry, it was important that we learned to balance intellectual dialogue with a suitable emotional environment to allow for better reflection and evaluation of our participants.

Likewise, as much research on emotion has shown, when we can connect our subjective reality with objective reality, emotions become an important source of information.¹⁷ No longer overwhelming us and denying external reality, emotions can in fact build bridges to a broader, more inclusive reality, yielding a transitional space that offers precisely this kind of both/and as an alternative to the either/or.

On March 23, 2013, all project participants were required to put together an event which we entitled *Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment*. This was the second phase of the project plan of implementation (see Appendix A), the first being education and training.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Hip-hop is a verb and so it means nothing if it is not put into action. So our project participants helped to produce a flyer (see Appendix D), and invited eMCees, DJ's, graffiti artist, b-boys and b-girls to perform at El Fogon Center for the Arts. I incorporated a participant-observant approach of analysis for

¹⁷ L. Greenberg, *Emotion and cognition in psychotherapy: The transforming power of affect* (Canadian Psychology, 2008).

this gathering for the purposes of building a case study that served to capture a Hip-hop spiritual experience by incorporating all of its elements into one space.

The venue was filled with spiritual quotes that hung up on strings supported by balloons. Quotes such as Pierre Teilhard De Chardin's "We are not human beings on a spiritual journey, we are spiritual beings on a human journey" seemed to capture much of the audience's attention based on my own observations. Two DJs played music while volunteers sold merchandise (including music from our performers) to help raise funds for the center—Hip-hop has always been about economic empowerment (see chapter 1). We also had live artwork that was displayed by local artists including members of our project.

It was not a large space but it was perfect for the creation of an intimate ambiance for this particular gathering. There was live art being produced by one of our focus group participants, along with break dancing performances which caught the attention of most people who entered the space. Also hanging on the walls were the Hip-hop Declaration of Peace and the Hip-hop Declaration of Spiritual Beliefs.

Both of these were necessary to my research because they served as reminders of what Hip-hop means to our culture and world, especially to our young people. Consequently, those poster-size versions of those documents became one additional stop that participants made when exploring this multi-sensory space which also included a television showing pictures of various positive Hip-hop artist and organizations.

Because the theme was *Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment*, I made sure each presenter first read the Hip-hop Declaration of Spiritual Beliefs (see Appendix J), and then asked each to answer the following questions: How was Hip-hop introduced to you

and how do you see that influencing your path and purpose in life? I felt that it was important to ask these questions to help generate genuine reflection over the correlation between Hip-hop culture and spirituality.

Many of these responses were captured in our photo booth which asked those who attended to complete the following phrase: “Hip-hop is...” Each person or group wrote their response on a small white erasable board (see Appendix D). One member of the project team responded by writing “Hip-hop is an outlet that lets you be what the rest of the world doesn’t let you be.” Another person, who happened to be one of the eMCees that performed for us, wrote “Hip-hop is life, love, *community* and skills.” These images can serve not only as great research feedback but also as great conversation starters for small group gatherings—similar to the ones that took place for my doctoral project. Another person from the community wrote that “Hip-hop is conscious raising” while another person wrote that Hip-hop is simple, “Freedom.”

But it was not until about an hour into the event that I decided to speak to our audience and address Hip-hop’s contributions to providing purpose to countless human beings by re-affirming their spirituality as honorary co-creators of the Divine. When we use our minds and bodies to express ourselves we reenact what God did to us when He created the universe, the world, and then us. I go on to say that “in knowing your Godly talents you become self-aware of your spiritual journey and that in itself is empowering.”

To empower means to transform the power into someone else. It is a synonym for liberation because it no longer puts a person or group of individuals in a position of dependency but in one of independence. For a young person, that might be something

much larger to conceptualize but nevertheless it is possible if he or she accepts the role and the benefits that come with it—purpose, self-worth, and spiritual maturity.

One cannot talk about spirituality without addressing the self-worth and purpose that is associated with being a Hip-hopper—especially when you consider the defamation that is plaguing the culture. Purpose stands at the core of spirituality because if you do not know what your purpose in this life is it will become difficult to tell someone else what theirs is. In the same way if you do not have self-worth then it is that much harder for you to show worth to someone else who truly seeks it.

Therefore, including the community in this dialogue was necessary because it showed the importance of their role in informing these artists, their self-worth, and their undeniable ability to empower others. We distributed surveys mid-way through the event to allow for ample time for the audience to experience more of this multi-faceted gathering of spiritual beings (see Appendix D).

The feedback came to us as followed. Of the over one-hundred people that were present that evening, forty-four responded to our questionnaire. That number is low due to the fact that we administered the surveys later than expected and throughout the evening people were leaving and coming in. In other words, many people were not given the survey.

Within that group of survey takers, the ages ranged from as young as ten-years of age to sixty-five with thirty year-olds (the Millennials) being the largest group. The group was also very diverse across ethnicities with countries such as Senegal, the Dominican Republic, and India—just to name a few—being represented. There was also

a plethora of religious groups ranging from Christians to Muslims to Humanists and Jainists (including atheists).

Forty-three of the forty-four people that responded believed that Hip-hop culture is spiritual. One respondent, a twenty-year-old male Latino, made reference to what I mentioned earlier in Chapter 1 concerning the significance of Hip-hop being inclusive of our elders and pioneers in the dialogue. He went on to say that, “Hip-hop carries the spirit of resistance waged by our Afro-Indigenous ancestors.” Another person—a thirty year-old female who practices Hinduism—further added that “I see Hip-hop being spiritual because of its power as a vehicle and catalyst for self-determination and social change.”

Social change is at the heart of spirituality because in order to change society you must first be transformed. All spiritual leaders experience some form of transformation when changing society—Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa, Archbishop Oscar Romero and Moses, just to name a few.

The Buddha, for example, underwent a complete transformation after leaving his opulent lifestyle for a life of poverty and deep meditation. His decision to denounce all that he owned forced him to look at the world differently, most notably with love and awareness.

Oscar Bishop Romero of El Salvador was similarly transformed when he witnessed the deaths of so many people with whom he associated. He became a changed man no longer attached to the walls of power but to the authority of a higher calling. This higher calling became what shifted the consciousness of the people, having now bridged the gap between faith and social justice.

What a spiritual experience does is allows for the creation of transitional spaces of connectedness between self and other. It allows us to get in touch with and reflect upon our experiences within a communal context.¹⁸ In this spiritual context, the self is connected both to its immediate emotional and existential reality, and to a greater transcendent other, or what theologian Paul Tillich calls “Ultimate Concern.”¹⁹ This ultimate concern is part of the conscious awareness objective of the doctoral project because participants become more open to sharing their stories in either the small groups or through Hip-hop’s aesthetics.

Consequently, we received much feedback that suggested Hip-hop was spiritual based on the event's success in creating a platform for change and resistance. So when asked if Hip-hop culture can facilitate social and/or spiritual transformation, thirty-eight said yes while only six were undecided.

One respondent wrote “that as long as it continues to speak truth to power, provide freedom and remain in the streets, it certainly will!” Another person suggested that “Hip-hop can challenge religious traditions that have historically oppressed people.” Many of our survey takers responded in this same line of thinking by recognizing Hip-hop culture as a movement of resistance and truth-telling.

Included in this feedback were our elders, some of whom were able to join us. One sixty-four-year-old male stated that by “involving youth in a coherent and cohesive community they will be able to experience the spirit.” I was happy to have read this response because this elder recognized the significance of having our youth as part of this

¹⁸ J.W. Jones, *Contemporary Psychoanalysis & Religion: Transference and Transcendence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

¹⁹ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958).

communal dialogue. Furthermore, it added to my research by showing the ability of Hip-hop cultural events to bring all age groups into its midst.

I found it really interesting that all of the individuals that were undecided about Hip-hop culture's ability to provide a socially spiritual and transformative experience were young people. One twenty-year-old African male (our focus group demographic) wrote that he was undecided because he felt that "all of Hip-hop is not about love"—I concur. This statement reinforces the need to have these kinds of events in the future because the more these tangible human expressions are made accessible to others the more we will counteract the negative stereotypes that are associated with Hip-hop culture thanks to Rap music.

I will never forget reading the response that was given by one thirteen-year-old male from Puerto Rico who wrote, "Hip-hop can be spiritual to those who understand it, but, it is more social to this generation than to those who don't understand it." This response was significant to our research because it served as a reminder of the mass exodus of youth and young adults who are leaving organized religion altogether. Additionally, the presence of Millennials at our event helped to solidify the need for a more interactive and involving space as opposed to the void that would have otherwise been experienced in Rap music and traditional forms of church and religion.

Much like the Millennial population, the current generation is also more focused on social justice endeavors than casual participation. And if there is one thing I have learned working in ministry for many years, it is that we have turned spiritual spaces into spectator arenas where youth are uninvolved and their realities are unexplored. If youth

and young adults continue to be marginalized in places of faith in this way then sooner or later they will reposition themselves to recreate their own spirituality.

Re-creation is the spirituality of Hip-hop culture. The power in re-creation is what continues to make Hip-hop relevant today and for centuries to come. This event on March 23 is a testament to that because, like the churches of antiquity, it has allowed for equal participation through creation, especially amongst our doctoral participants—that is Hip-hop! It further teaches us that spirituality becomes active in the 21st Century when all of its members are co-creating together to establish the beloved community that Reverend Dr. King spoke of during the Civil Rights Movement—or, what I like to call a social spiritual movement.

The idea that spirituality can belong to only one group of faith or faiths has not only been proven wrong throughout this project, I also believe this exclusivity puts limits on God's Divinity. Who are we to judge other people's spiritual experiences?

This was one of the many lessons that I learned when putting together this event. It reminded me of the short yet intensive course that I participated in on Kabbalah in the summer of 2013 as part of my ministerial competencies in spiritual leadership (see Appendix G).

The Kabbalah Centre of New York is a special place because it too is challenging the normative views of spirituality and sacred spaces—considering it is thousands of years old. Kabbalah was one of the most inspiring and transformative spiritual trainings and disciplines that I have ever engaged in. It has taught me to look at myself and others in a whole new light. It teaches us to develop a relationship with the Creator by restricting our ego and by developing a greater capacity to share with others. This kind of

spirituality stands at the core of my project because it is in the sharing of Hip-hop's aesthetics that we give of ourselves to others and in turn re-define our esoteric roles as co-creators of the Divine.

During these weekly small gatherings we, about forty people, learned that Kabbalah is not a religion. Despite its affiliation with Judaism, Kabbalah acknowledges itself as ancient wisdom that helps activate one's soul. Truth be told, religion was intended to be a system with one goal and that is to connect to the light of God, the source of everything good. However, when we misconstrue religion's purpose and use it to abuse our fellow beings we create far more darkness in the world. We create separation instead of unity, death instead of continuity, and hatred instead of love. Religions promote the ego instead of the creator and harden a person's heart.

Kabbalah's reputation to draw so many people into its space and it has a lot to do with its teachings of accepting other faiths while simultaneously being critical of all of them. This mantra resembles that of the Hip-hop Declaration of Spiritual Beliefs in that it encompasses a wide range of religious traditions yet only recognizes one true God. In creating unity and not division participants in Kabbalah are better able to share their experiences as spiritual dwellers and not religious conformers. Kabbalah challenges institutional faith by getting into the root of ones' existential essence by transforming the soul of a person and not the person *per se*.

Kabbalah, much like our March 23 event, has taught me that spirituality can only come to life when we share it in a free-flow communal context, one free of religious boundaries. Clearly the Church is in no position to claim authority over this experience when people are continuing to leave her in mass numbers. However, I see a new spiritual

age on the horizon and it is only made visible when it is in motion much like ministry in the church is real only when it is put into action. When we allow our youth to be a part of the theological and spiritual discourses we do not create a system of dependency but a community of leaders who have become transformed and empowered.

And thus a dialogue between one's subjective experience and external reality becomes spiritual when connected to the broader social realities of human beings.²⁰ For example, liberation theologian Dr. James Cone argues that for spirituality to be meaningful it must speak to one's own individual lived experience. Cone argues for the need of a back and forth between one's socio-historical and cultural context in juxtaposition with one's own spirituality.²¹ It is in this delicate dance that the experience of the Divine truly comes alive. There is something about seeing our experience reflected in the eyes of the so-called "other", to feel that we are a part of a greater whole, which is profoundly spiritual.

Cone's position, and that of other liberation theologians, that God makes a preferential option for the oppressed, brings together the immanent nature of the lived world of marginalized people, with the transcendent otherness of one's ultimate concern. To put it another way, creating and finding an ultimate concern in God, in the struggles of one's community, in the call to care for the poor, the orphan, and the widow, one undergoes a spiritual transformation and makes a spiritual connection.

²⁰ Daniel Gaztambide, "Religion as a wellspring of healing and liberation: Toward a liberation psychology of religion," in *The Healing Power of Religion Vol 2: Religion*, ed. J. Harold Ellens (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger/ABC-CLIO, 2009).

²¹ James Cone, *The Spiritual and the Blues* (New York: Orbis Books, 1972).

CHAPTER 3 EMPOWERMENT

Hip-hop culture's ability to empower the masses is undeniable. As part of my research questions (see Appendix A), I selected the Book of Isaiah as my Biblical text to exemplify Hip-hop culture's continuing tradition of empowerment by highlighting its undeniable potential to bless those who have experienced its hip and hop. Although New York Theological Seminary is grounded in the Biblical tradition, it is important that I note the empowering characteristics associated with other religions, sacred parables, and, in particular, one's own personal life experiences. Nevertheless, to deny the empowering narratives that are found throughout the Judeo-Christian Bible would be to deny God's transcendent power to liberate suffering people into freedom.

Most Biblical scholars would agree with the multiple experiences that make-up the Book of Isaiah. With three distinct authors, the Book of Isaiah appears to have been written to convey the various experiences that were enabled by Isaiah's prophetic voice. I will primarily be focusing on the third section of the Book of Isaiah, or what's commonly referred to as the *Trito Isaiah*, with specific attention put on Chapter 58, verse 12.

Isaiah was an 8th Century (BCE) prophet that lived during the reign of King Uzziah of Judah following the occupation of the Babylonian Empire.²² The Ancient Israelite occupation plagued God's chosen people with vices due to the intermingling of

²² Barry Webb, *The Message of Isaiah: On Eagles' Wings* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1997).

pagan rituals and false ideologies. As a result, God placed in the heart of the prophet Isaiah what Dr. Peter Heltzel describes as a call for “restorative justice”, a calling of the people to come back to the origination of past things.

A “restorative justice”, according to Dr. Heltzel, suggests the transformation of old ways into new ones. To restore means to bring back, while justice in its traditional sense means to bring moral rightness through equity and fairness.

The restoration of justice is a common theme throughout the Judeo-Christian Bible. For example, the Ten Commandments served as Yahweh’s moral code to His people immediately after Moses was given the tablets. Upon returning from the mountain where he was being instructed by God, the people had turned away from Yahweh and had devoted their minds and hearts in pagan rituals and sinful celebrations. Consequently, the Mosaic Law served as a restorative justice by calling the Ancient Israelites back into a relationship with the Creator.

The same could be said about Jesus Christ, whose sole purpose was to break the chains of sin and to free souls through His own restorative justice. Much like the Prophet Isaiah, Jesus’ message to the people became more visible due to his unyielding quest to challenge the Roman Empire by bringing his ministry into the streets. While some may argue he took the law into his own hands by simply creating a grassroots movement that sided with the marginalized communities of the time, it is clear that the project of restorative justice that was passed down to Moses and later the prophets still remained at the top of Jesus’ agenda since, according to Him, “do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have not come to abolish but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17 NRSV).

Jesus understood the significance of keeping the restorative justice tradition alive by highlighting the work of the prophets in once again bringing order to the people of God. Much like Moses' re-entrance to his Hebrew family after his transformation, Jesus called the people in the synagogue to transform themselves in proclaiming His Divine calling by reintroducing the Divine law of restorative justice to a new group of people.

In the Hebrew text, the word *Qara'*, referenced in the first verse of Isaiah 58, means to "call back". It can also be translated "to cry out loud" or "recite."²³ This outcry was in response to a marginalized group of people who were experiencing harsh conditions under colonial rule. This is the social context that made up the prophet Isaiah's reality and first task—the declaration of Yahweh's message of justice and the restoration of His people.

In a similar fashion, in 1982 (a little under a decade after the birth of Hip-hop culture and also my birth year) eMCee Grandmaster Melle Mel, Hip-hop pioneer and member of the group The Furious Five, released a song entitled *The Message*.²⁴ This became the first mainstream Hip-hop song to describe the:

"Harsh realities of ghetto life, only to put it into a Hip-hop beat. Raw and full of a passion that only a person who lived what they spoke could have. Flash and his crew explained the depressed environment that they grew up in and the toll it took on the spirit and the minds of the people."²⁵

This outcry was the beginning of a line of Hip-hop prophetic voices, given the significant role that the eMCee has as the "Town Crier" or the "Vocal Catalyst" of the movement. Artists such as 2Pac, Immortal Technique and Lauryn Hill, just to name a

²³ Brown et al., "Hebrew Lexicon entry for Qara". "The NAS Old Testament Hebrew Lexicon".

²⁴ Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, *The Message*, The Message 12", Sugar Hill Records. 1982.

²⁵ Tayannah Lee McQuillar and Brother J, *When Rap Music Had a Conscience: The Artists, Organizations and Historic Events that Inspired and Influenced the Golden Age of Hip-Hop from 1987 to 1996* (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2007), 5.

few, are examples of eMCees that speak truth to power. Because eMCee means Minister to the Crowd, as an eMCee I myself try to integrate my own voice with the voices of my community when performing, much like Melle Mel did for his community in the Bronx.

The Bronx is a multicultural, multiethnic and multigenerational cross-road with a rich history. According to the 2010 consensus, the Bronx has about 1.4 million inhabitants, with a rapidly growing second and third generation population in its south side district. This section of the Bronx is known as the sixteenth congressional district and has the highest poverty rate in the United States.²⁶

The disproportionate level of unemployment, income, education, and the overall social disparities, a byproduct of the mass post-war urban exodus of the 1950s and the post-Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, affected the landscape of the Bronx. Today, the Bronx finds itself facing similar sociological challenges, considering the high rates of stop and frisk on “minority” groups by the New York Police Department,²⁷ and its ongoing battle with poor school systems.

But it was here that Hip-hop was born; on the tongues of globalized, transnational, urban poor bodies in de-industrialized and divested spaces. It organically created spaces for disenfranchised youth of the African Diaspora to make known their concerns regarding the social, economic, and political realities of their lives as they related to their broader social context.

²⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, *2010 New York 17 Congressional District*, <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/popmap/ipmtext.php?fl=36:3617>, Accessed July 27, 2012.

²⁷ Stolarik, Robert. “Stop and Frisk Policy – New York City Police Department.” *New YorkTimes*, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/s/stop_and_frisk/index.html (accessed October 18, 2012).

And so the Bronx became the setting where Hip-hop was utilized as a medium for expressing the sociological concerns of the 1970s (the decade of Hip-hop's birth) the 1980s (my generation), and the 1990s. Many of these concerns resulted in the internal displacement of families due to poor urban planning, and the racist/xenophobic milieu that came from large waves of immigrants of distinct ethnic backgrounds moving in and around the South Bronx.

Keeping in mind the diversity that makes up Hip-hop culture, Dr. Peter Heltzel points out that “the Book of Isaiah speaks to many voices and on behalf of many different communities.”²⁸ Because Isaiah lived in such an expansive empire, he spoke to a group of people with diverse cultural influences and traditions. Mastering the art of inclusive language therefore becomes strategically important when mobilizing the community behind a common goal(s).

As such, I asked a variety of clergy—especially those that were involved in this project—to critique my own preaching as part of my ministerial competencies as a lay minister. In this way, I was able to gain additional insight into how I might incorporate a more inclusive theology that reflected the diversity of the Hip-hop community (see Appendix H).

The first clergy member to observe my preaching was the Reverend Doctor Arnold Thomas. As my former boss at the Riverside Church, I felt compelled to reach out to him as a credible source for developing my oratory skills. Having served as the former Director of Religious Education, Dr. Thomas saw my style as both interactive and theologically sound, considering the challenges that come with speaking to a diverse

²⁸ Peter Goodwin Heltzel, *Resurrection City: A Theology of Improvisation* (Grand Rapids: W.M. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012).

crowd in Harlem. I preached at the Riverside Church's famous *Space for Grace* which has a reputation for bringing in dynamic preachers for as long as I have been alive.

I preached for about an hour but I made sure that the audience's attention was not limited to my preaching alone. I invited a local spoken word artist to perform in response to my sermon which focused on not marginalizing our youth in ministry and reminded the audience that Jesus instructed us to "let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." (Matt. 19:14 NRSV)

In keeping with the tradition of Hip-hop, I told the audience that this is one major way our youth are communicating with us and we should not decline its power but use it in ministry to grow the church and empower our young people. This sermon was prophetic considering my three years working as the former associate director of youth ministry.

The Riverside Church, in my experience, falls under the category of the dying mainline church phenomenon, having itself experienced a large drop in service attendance with a majority of its congregants over the age of sixty-five. This sermon was not only necessary for this audience to hear, but it reminded me of the prophetic responsibility that I have to call out truth whenever an ambiance of wrong is hovering over God's house—a common outcry for a faith-rooted organizer such as the prophet Isaiah. Nevertheless, the audience received my sermon very well, and, according to Reverend Doctor Thomas, my ongoing fear of speaking in public was unnoticeable.

My second sermon took place in Brooklyn, New York at the Zion Church of the Truth. I was invited by Reverend Doctor Peggy Anderson where I was asked to speak for about forty minutes about my relationship between Hip-hop and spirituality. One major

critique from Reverend Doctor Peggy Anderson was my lack of clarity in making the connection between Hip-hop and Christianity from a scriptural perspective. As a result there was a disconnect between myself and the predominately Haitian immigrant congregation who only sees God in this light.

Furthermore, the sermon became even more incomprehensible when you consider the lack of Hip-hop knowledge that existed in the audience, even among the younger generation. Although my sermon was presented in more of what Reverend Doctor Peggy Anderson calls, a “Hip-hop flow” (see Appendix H), it should not alienate people who are not in sync with this style of preaching.

This sermon experience taught me the challenges that come with speaking to such a diverse community—ethnically, inter-generationally, linguistically, culturally and theologically. I guess my lack of clarity was countered by the traditional Christian views of the speaker who preached after me. He spoke more from a Scriptural and testimonial perspective, having accepted Hip-hop as speaking only to the Christian community and not really other traditions. Although he recognized the diversity of Hip-hop to include other faiths he refrained from speaking to those other realities having been “born again” and therefore personally called to do God’s work by spreading Jesus’ love through Hip-hop.

This view on Hip-hop as being ‘Christian Hip-hop’ or “Holy Hip-hop” has been challenging for me to accept as I feel some Hip-hoppers use Hip-Hop's culture as means to an end, much like religion uses dogma for a similar fashion. Sadly, this speaker and I did not connect following the sermon due to my opposing views of Hip-hop as being all inclusive, hence my use of the term spirituality. However, it appears that my message

was lost in translation the more I moved away from the Christian context found in Hip-hop to that of looking at Hip-hop as an empowering tool for our youth. I will never forget this experience as I continue to wrestle with this notion of “Hip-hop Christianity versus Hip-hop Spirituality.”

My next and final sermon took place in the beautiful country of Nigeria on the continent of Africa. Youth Minister and President of the National Council of Churches in Nigeria, Kehinde Adebayo invited me to minister to a crowd of over 10,000 young people for their annual Halleluiah Night celebration. Not only was I excited to be in Africa for the first time, but I was extremely joyful toward the hospitality, warm reception, and gratitude that was given to me by church leaders, youth, politicians, the national media and local tribes.

I spoke about how Hip-hop is such a social spiritual force based on its global presence and its pursuit of social justice. Unlike my other two sermons, I took a multi-sensory approach by including a short sermon, a Hip-hop performance, and a PowerPoint presentation. Because this program was intended for youth to gain a more intimate relationship with God, I embraced this opportunity to inform the audience that God is Hip-hop and that I am a reflection of that truth—and so are they.

With high unemployment rates amongst youth in Nigeria, and continuous conflicts between Christian and Muslims, I encouraged our young people to utilize Hip-hop culture for peace and reconciliation much like Jesus approached his ministry in a non-violent way. Because of the amazing feedback that I got from the audience and the president of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), Minister Kehinde Adebayo had nothing but positive things to say to me.

My previous sermon experience in Brooklyn had helped to better equip me for a similar experience because both of these environments represented a conservative form of Christianity. So instead of overly emphasizing the spirituality of Hip-hop I focused primarily on the spiritual power that is found in the ministry of Jesus who walked amongst the poor and disenfranchised.

I was reminded that I can still speak an inclusive language when talking from a Christian perspective. In this way, my objectives are still met: spirituality and empowerment. Of course, I felt I had a slight disadvantage considering the mass media production that was placed before my arrival, putting me in the position of some sort of celebrity: an “American Hip-hopper.” Yes I am both, but my mission there was to help our young people, not to distance myself from them by way of these high accolades. Nevertheless, my time in Africa was one that I will never forget for the rest of my life having spoken in front of my largest audience to date.

All of the aforementioned sermon experiences were beneficial to my professional and spiritual growth. Three different sermons with three distinct experiences certainly helped me to prepare for what was to come next as it related to my doctoral project.

I am certain the prophet Isaiah, much like Moses and Jesus, experienced many highs and lows when trying to speak prophetically to all human beings. It is the challenge of any orator and teacher to get everyone on the same page while simultaneously allowing room for each person to find their own voice.

The last component of my plan of implementation (see Appendix A), which I will mention momentarily, not only helped me with my own professional development but it assured that all voices were going to be heard—as reflected in my ability to pastor as a

lay minister. Following our March 23 event (see chapter 2) and our first few gatherings (see chapter 1), the project participants were asked to give feedback to our community through the development of a small documentary (see Appendix A). The purpose of this would be to raise the awareness of Hip-hop's spiritual trajectory by highlighting the many voices that make up the broader Hip-hop community. Its long-term use however was to educate the general public concerning Hip-hop's true origin and purpose—peace, love, unity and having fun!

Unfortunately, my adviser's unexpected illness prohibited us from ever showing this documentary, which would have included a panel discussion with the project participants on Saturday October 12, 2013 at the Riverside Church in Harlem (see Appendix E). Following the panel discussion would be a question-and-answer segment that would have been concluded with a survey to the audience. This event would have added further information to our mixed-research analysis in accordance with the ethnographic findings from the documentary research and our subsequent data collection.

Nonetheless, we were able to receive feedback from the project participants through our post-evaluation forms—which served as the closing of the project (see Appendix B). These evaluations were significant to our research because they allowed us to measure the transformation that our participants experienced after an intensive Hip-hop and spirituality regimen. Furthermore, this last piece of research analysis would serve for the purposes of producing the first ever Hip-hop and spirituality guideline and manual for future programming and curricula.

When asked by all project participants, including one member of my site team, if they would recommend this project as a form of ministry or for educational purposes, we

exceeded our 75% goal with a 100% approval rate! This information is crucial considering the departure of countless people from faith practices—as discussed in previous chapters. In other words, these findings can serve as an alternative to a huge spiritual void that dominates our broader social landscape. This mass confusion of spirituality in our society along with the negative perceptions of Hip-hop culture and its music is what one participant described in his post-evaluation form as being a “good conversation starter.”

The countless dialogues that took place all throughout this project were in fact great “conversations starters.” And while the conversations may have started here, they certainly will not end here. Much as spirituality continues to flow in all directions and throughout all the people of this world, it is challenging to capture this in our groups in light of the challenges we confronted, such as a low budget, inconsistent attendance, and limited resources. Nevertheless, we were able to capture as much as we could in hope that it was enough to begin a broader conversation about what is happening right now. As with any other leadership role, one begins with a conversation—not a monologue—with respect for individuals so that we all can collectively move forward together.

For this reason the reflections by Yahweh to the prophet Isaiah in the middle of Chapter 58 are important, because they involved the community and their past contributions. This is important when doing faith-rooted organizing, as the prophet Isaiah did, because it reminded the people of what makes them who they are.

In going back in time, one reflects over this time and realizes their self-worth when others may not have. While the earthly things may have brought about a temporary

pleasure to the Ancient Israelites sojourning in Babylon, Yahweh reminds them of their historical relationship to the Divine Law as a people who are invested heavily in their own spirituality.

Because of the absence of their spirituality, in verse 6, for example, Yahweh asks the people to reflect on their souls as instruments of justice by asking them:

“Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (Isa. 58:6 NRSV)

These reflection questions imply a sense of duty and social agency. It holds so much spiritual significance that these same questions were also posed by Jesus of Nazareth in Chapter 25, verses 35-36, of the Book of Matthew where it reads:

“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” (Matt. 25:35-36 NRSV)

Again, we see a consistency in prophetic language and a sense of duty where both the prophet Isaiah and Jesus Christ are asked to remind the people of their Divine duty: a restorative justice. This civic responsibility was a theme echoing throughout my project because it served as a reminder that spirituality and care for humanity go hand in hand—hence, the significance of the March 23 event, to give back to the community.

With the first assignment of the prophet Isaiah being to call all of the community in verse 1, in verse 6 we are asked to care for the community after reflecting upon it. So that, if completed, this caring would bring delight unto Yahweh and create a more intimate relationship with the Creator and ones’ own purpose.

Thus, when asked if Hip-hop can be used as a catalyst for individual and/or community empowerment, one participant responded via our post-evaluation form by stating that “Hip-hop can be used as a medium to communicate with each other.” Another participant stated that “those who preserve, teach and spiritually guide the movement can teach you to follow and lead [as well]”. These two responses, including that of several of our other participants, touched on two very important things in this process: communication and education. These are primary skills that are necessary for (great) leaders when conveying spiritual messages to a secular society. After all, the very word professor derives from the Latin for a person who professes—truth!

Yet, one must remember that Isaiah confronted a people who had turned away from God because of their pagan rituals and ideologies. In a similar fashion, many of our Hip-hop community members, particularly our youth, have been the victims of pagan rituals as seen in Rap videos and in their indulgences in the false god of capitalism. Consequently, it is this dominant, corporate driven view of Hip-hop (see my discussion in chapter 1) that is causing a spiritual crisis within the Hip-hop community, much as the Ancient Israelites experienced.

Because of Hip-hop’s global influence and growing popularity, this corporate approach of “doing” Hip-hop continues to affect the Hip-hop community by first demonizing it to our youth. Throughout my research I have spoken with many people about this subject and many have claimed a disappointment in the direction of where Hip-hop is going. One participant said to the group “it all sounds the same to me” while another person argued “Hip-hop culture, in the words of eMCee Mos Def, goes where we take it.” The people of Yahweh, much like the Hip-hop culture, were losing their souls

the more they developed an attachment for earthly things and detached themselves from spiritual ones.

The excessive pursuits of wealth, materialism and false deities have become the reasons Yahweh is calling the community to come back, or *Qara*. ' This call to come back is a necessary task for places of faith, especially the church.

For example, in 2010, the Roman Catholic Church implemented a *Catholics Come Home* Campaign for the purposes of calling back Catholics who had left the church. This initiative was a reflection of the dying mainline church phenomenon—Roman Catholics are no strangers to its effects. With no one to serve, a ripple effect occurs and you have countless private schools, after school programs, and community centers being shut down.

These are the physical structures that require rebuilding of which Yahweh speaks. In the context of my project I ask, how can Hip-hop be a part of those kinds of restructuring projects?

It would first need to reconstruct itself before restructuring its broader community. Because Hip-hop is not an isolated movement we have to keep in view the bigger picture and consider the challenges that other communities are facing as well. After all, what affects one person affects us all. In other words, the decline of the church should not be the objective of Hip-hop's considering its spiritual growth. This is why I felt it was important that I ask our participants if they were affiliated with a faith community: I wanted to know if they had a faith foundation in addition to knowing if they had an interest in going back, something which came up in our conversations together.

Despite my own reservations about my faith, as a practicing Roman Catholic I have hope that people will come back much like people of other traditions and faith should come back. After all, the new Pope, Pope Francis, is a Jesuit which means he abides by the tradition of St. Ignatius in which God is said to be found in all things.

Hopefully that includes Hip-hop in his eyes. But in the context of Hip-hop it, much like the Roman Catholics Campaign, is calling Hip-hoppers to come back to its original purpose. And this brings us back to the main focus of the Book of Isaiah: Chapter 58, verse 12, which reads “your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.” (Isa. 58:12 NRSV).

The rebuilding of the ancient walls can be interpreted both literally and metaphorically. The former being clear in its intention to rebuild the physical structures and territories that makes up the people of Yahweh. The latter, however, suggests a rebuilding and restoring of the minds and hearts of the people. But Yahweh promises this restoration only if the people follow through, for if they do, they will be free.

This was the job entrusted to Isaiah by Yahweh, which began with the call to come back. Second, the people were reintroduced to Yahweh by way of reflection and third, empowered by getting lost in the servitude and justice of others. It is in the interweaving of servitude where art, dialogue, and understanding of knowledge of self and social justice intersect, and we begin to see spirituality organically manifest itself in Hip-hop culture. It is in the development of these creative spaces that transformational communities have been birthed and where individuals become empowered.

Dr. Peter Heltzel describes the gatherings of these communities in his book, *Resurrection City*, as being transformational spaces. He defines transformational space as “altogether improvisational, theatrical, a community on the move and [that] is being lead by people of the margins.”²⁹

My short time with this doctoral group, along with my experiences traveling, attending conferences, and speaking publicly has shown me that Hip-hop culture is undeniably creating transformative spaces, sacred spaces. This is similar to how Jesus conducted his ministry through public gatherings which drew large crowds such as the one present to hear the Beatitudes that are found in the Book of Matthew, chapter 5, verses 1-12.

Jesus’ ministry also included demonstrations as a sign of protest, such as his encounter with the woman at the well in the Book of John, chapter 4, verses 4-26. And most importantly, these demonstrations would not be well known had it not been for human emotion, such as when we see an upset Jesus flipping tables in the synagogue in the Book of Mark, chapter 11, verses 15-18. Transitional spaces are then public demonstrations of various emotions that speak to justice—that is Hip-hop.

At our March 23 event we partnered up with a not-for-profit organization called FuntoSalud International (see Appendix D). FuntoSalud International provides humanitarian aid to people living on the border of the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Because Hip-hop culture comes out of the struggle of oppressed peoples, it is almost natural that we partnered up with people who are part of this restorative justice vocation.

I am certain the prophet confronted the issue of forming these kinds of partnership considering how much ground he had to cover in a massive empire. Therefore,

²⁹ Heltzel, *Resurrection City*.

transformational spaces are ones that are always on the move because the Spirit never stops, it continues to inspire and empower.

This interpretation of the Church as transformational spaces, as defined by Dr. Heltzel, further reinforces the arguments that were made in previous chapters regarding the spatiality of spirituality. Dr. Heltzel's definition, and that of other theologians like Dr. Hal Taussing, is adding to the public discourses surrounding the deconstruction of normative views on sacred spaces. Dr. Heltzel takes a critical look at the role of the Church by looking at communities that have been transformed when art is being improvised—i.e. Hip-hop—to empower suffering communities.

Transformational spaces are the result of prophetic leaders who have changed the course of history forever. Much like Moses in Egypt and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the United States, Hip-hop culture in the Bronx allowed for prophetic voices like Afrika Bambaataa, Kool DJ Herc, and Melle Mel to create similar spaces of transformation for marginalized communities living in the hood. It was their vision that brought together the community of the Bronx to hear a *Message(s)* that would eventually send spiritual ripples for future Hip-hop generations to come. One Hip-hopper that follows this tradition is the Honorable George Martinez who is committed to Hip-hop education and empowerment as a Hip-hop ambassador.

In fact, Hon. George Martinez is an excellent example of what it means to be a faith-rooted organizer because he uses his political power to empower the community. While he may come off as your typical politician, in an interview that I had with him he assured me that it was much deeper than politics. He went on to say that “global change begins with first having local power that is fueled by a Higher Infinite Power” (see

Appendix F). In speaking and working closely with Hon. George Martinez as part of my faith-rooted ministerial competency, I was able to gain much insight on how Hip-hop has added to his life's purpose and his own spirituality. By using the element of eMCeeing, Hon. George Martinez continues to motivate (young) people to voice their own opinions on political issues through workshops and educational programs that train them on how to systematically transform communities.

When deeply studying the Book of Isaiah, one can see how Isaiah's prophetic role can resemble that of a politician because he was instructed by Yahweh to reinstate the moral laws that make up the spiritual ethos of this community. So Isaiah, much like Hon. George Martinez, played a dual role by cultivating peoples' spirituality using earthly tools to unearth a message.

Another example of a prophetic leader is the Reverend Doctor Mariah Britton, who is the founder of the Moriah Institute. This Rights of Passage program provides youth with the emotional, spiritual and intellectual capabilities to help guide them to their purpose in life. I met with one of Dr. Mariah's mentors (who will remain anonymous) in addition to observing her program as part of my spiritual leader development for my ministerial competencies (see Appendix G).

One of the things that make this program so special is that it welcomes all youth. Because spirituality is at the core of the curriculum, it does not use the traditional religious milieu to dominate the overall mission. This seven month journey therefore challenges the traditional ways of ministering to our youth by placing them in charge of their path to adulthood instead of the other way around. As an alternative to having

adults push their ideologies down their throats, the Moriah Institute creates a community of equal voices that is constantly allowing youth to recreate its own space.

This kind of ministry allows for young people to explore the world and how they can contribute to it by changing the traditional roles of leadership. Much like the alternative approach to pedagogy as described by Paolo Freire,³⁰ the Moriah Institute encourages each participant to validate their own opinions as teachable moments for everyone. This puts youth in a position of empowerment because it no longer allows them to be a flock that is dependent on the shepherd—they have become the shepherd.

Unlike the Moriah Institute, where the young people were guided into their discernment, many of our project participants already had their minds set on contributing to the Hip-hop culture in their own respective way. This allowed for us to focus more on raising their awareness regarding Hip-hop culture's vocational potential because of its spirituality and its ability to provide purpose for human beings.

During our nine months together, I found myself getting lost in my participants' spirituality. I got to know this group of individuals as spiritual beings who are navigating the world using the compass of Hip-hop. Because spirituality is a journey, I was constantly finding myself reconnecting with them whenever they realized that they were changing the world one beat at a time.

When discussing Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment, the conversation eventually takes on a life of its own much like the art that it produces. It was the spiritual synergy that was manifested in the March 23 event (see previous chapter), for example, when my research truly came to life because it redefined spirituality and re-imagined sacred space. People were able to connect and learn from each other through challenging

³⁰ Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1972).

the traditional theological and ecclesiological discourses as newly appointed spiritual authorities.

My research findings have shown that Hip-hop culture does in fact have a socio-spiritual trajectory. Much of this understanding comes from highlighting significant historical moments in Hip-hop culture.

In many instances we find this form of empowerment occurring in Hip-hop, such as the 1989 Stop the Violence Movement. It was eMCee KRS-ONE's song entitled *Self-Destruction*³¹ that inspired Hip-hoppers and the broader community to start a not-for-profit organization to end street violence in our neighborhoods. This coalition of artist provided programs, workshops, and media campaigns, to heighten the awareness of the effects of violence on youth, using Hip-hop. This was seven years following Melle Mel's *The Message*, adding to Hip-hop's ongoing list of prophetic leaders.

The conscious awareness that has come from these men has also inspired our women—without whom Hip-hop would be nothing—to voice their own opinions. In 1994, eMCee Queen Latifah, released her song U.N.I.T.Y.³² which spoke out against the disrespect of women in society, including issues such as domestic violence and slurs against women in Hip-hop culture. It was Queen Latifah's outcry that inspired other powerful women like Toni Blackman to do the same. Toni Blackman is the first Hip-hop Cultural Envoy with the State Department to travel to several countries all over the world. Toni Blackman's diplomatic work with other women in war infested countries

³¹ KRS-ONE, *Self-Destruction*, Self-Destruction 12", Jive Records, 1989.

³² Queen Latifah, *U.N.I.T.Y.*, U.N.I.T.Y. 12", Motown Records, 1994.

from all over the world may have contributed to the creation of the Hip-hop Declaration of Peace.

In 2001, hundreds of Hip-hoppers came to the United Nations to introduce the Hip-hop Declaration of Peace, a unifying document that was adopted, for the purpose of using it for international peace and reconciliation. It was the only time in history in which the genre commonly known as Rap music received international recognition as a nonviolent culture that sought "a foundation of health, love, awareness, wealth, peace and prosperity for ourselves, our children and their children's children, forever" (see Appendix I). These eighteen principles were written to respect Hip-hop culture and to unify all of the voices that make up the Hip-hop Diaspora. It also served as a reminder, much like Yahweh reminded the people through the prophet Isaiah, that all things in the past will be restored now for the future.

What would follow this transformative experience was the creation of the Hip-hop Declaration of Spiritual Beliefs, a document inspired by KRS-ONE's book, *The Gospel of Hip-hop* and Minister Server Tavares's Hip-hop Ministries, Inc. As I mentioned in the first chapter, we were honored to have Minister Server join us to discuss the significance of this document, among others. He described it as a creed, but one with no religious ties because it acknowledges "all sacred text as expressions of the Most High God, known by many attributes" (see Appendix J).

The Hip-hop Declaration of Spiritual Beliefs can be viewed as an ecumenical document that recognizes all faiths by uniting them with the understanding that all of them lead to a greater understanding of spirituality. It is also an excellent "conversation starter" and educational tool that can be used to learn about Hip-hop, spirituality and

ones' own personal purpose. Principle number five says it best when it states that “we believe that God allows each person to be on earth to fulfill a divine purpose that only he or she can complete.”

It was surprising to see how many of our doctoral participants were aware of the Hip-hop Declaration of Peace but not the Hip-hop Declaration of Spiritual Beliefs. As Minister Sever explained to the project participants, people are not aware of it because it has not been as publicized as the Declaration of Peace. But in my own mind, I thought to myself, “I think it’s time that it was!” For this reason, I always brought both documents everywhere I went to speak—including our March 23 event—to remind people that this is not just about peace, but about the peace in your soul.

Although the Hip-hop Declaration of Spiritual Beliefs is not as visible, its seeds have certainly been planted. In the same way, the seeds of this project have been sown and begun to bear fruit in ways I had never imagined. Upon completion of this project, one of our participants invited me to attend a Hip-hop event in Harlem that he put together to help raise money for a local not-for-profit organization (see Appendix C). I was so happy to see that he did this because one always wonders if people are listening. Is this really real? Can this really be happening, I ask? The short answer is, yes!

Another example comes from one of our female participants who before this project had no education on Hip-hop culture. Unfortunately, mid-way through the project she had to discontinue her participation due to a family emergency. But to my surprise, she reached out to me before the end of the project by sending me a text message with a picture of her attending a talk by Dr. Mark Anthony Neal entitled *Hip-*

hop before Hip-hop: A History. I later bumped into this video online and made the connection between her text image and the presentation that Dr. Neal made instantly—that's the world we are living in, fast and virtual.

Coincidentally, Dr. Neal, who is currently in residence at the Hip-hop Archives at the W.E.B. Dubois Institute at Harvard University, discussed how the “Post–Hip-hop Generation” uses social media and digital technology to redefine protests, social justice and activism. He goes on to say that “social media allows youth access and mobility to large networks to help ‘amplify’ issues of concern to create a ‘digital counter public.’”³³

In other words, the world of social media has become so expansive that it has allowed for more unheard voices and unseen faces in the public eye. Although the focus of attention was given to Hip-hop culture's contributions to political and social justice discourses, I believe the same can be said about Hip-hop's ability to expand upon the theological and spiritual discourses of our time.

Despite my disappointment over not having our documentary shown, I am confident in the effect that it will have when it does come into fruition in the near future. But this is what makes the doctorate of ministry program at New York Theological Seminary so special: anyone who chooses to take on Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment can pick up where we left off—and make it even better. What was supposed to be the final piece of my plan of implementation (see Appendix A), the creation of a documentary, would have served as a practical tool that shows the unheard voices of the Hip-hop community as both spiritual authorities and future leaders of transformed communities. In collaborating with this community which included artist,

³³ Mark Anthony Neal, “Hip-Hop: Movement Beyond the Music” (speech, Chicago, IL, October 19, 2013), Chicago Ideas Week, <https://www.chicagoideas.com/videos/498>.

Hip-hop pioneers, scholars, community activist and educators, the negative perception of Hip-hop culture becomes challenged as does the phenomenon of the dying mainline Church.

Just imagine more churches and other communities of faith posting several of these short Hip-hop documentaries exhibiting this kind of transformation. Imagine more YouTube videos, Facebook shares, Instagram photos and other social media networks used to inform the general public of a new ministry that is being used to fill in the spiritual void that is pushing people out of mainstream faith. What you get is a shift in power where the power is now coming from the very people God is calling to restore the streets they live in.

The restorative justice of the Prophet Isaiah represented this sort of power shift when Yahweh placed a revolutionary mind and heart in the people which became their initial transformation. A transformation that has to take place first in oneself in order to transfer it over to others. When people see your transformation by making the connection between the “old you” and the “new you” it becomes contagious....it becomes, empowering!

Hip-hop is destined for this kind of Divine change—a restorative justice— by making visible its call to restore our streets for future generations to come forever and ever. For I prophesize that if more of these videos are produced and put online for the 21st Century virtual world to see, the more the revolution will actually be televised.

CONCLUSION

I remember once speaking with a former mentor of mine—a priest—about the concept of heaven. The reason this came up was because I wanted to know if Christianity was the only way to make it to heaven. This question weighed heavily on my mind due to my discernment process at the time. I'll never forget what his answer to my question was. He said, "Picture heaven like a huge body of ocean where each river is a distinct faith that leads toward that big body of ocean." After completing this project I can truly say with conviction that Hip-hop culture is one of those rivers that are leading toward that ocean.

The countless number of people that come up to me expressing their joy and transformation is unspeakable. In fact, I find it very difficult to put in words, to say nothing of writing, what I experienced throughout most of 2013.

I learned just as much from those persons as I hope they have learned from me. In many instances I found myself doubting the thought of pursuing a project that viewed Hip-hop as being transformative, let alone spiritual. But when I look back upon my own life and how it is that I have arrived at this juncture in my life, I can only say that it is God who is at work here. Truth to be told I never thought I was going to be pursuing a Doctorate of Ministry with a focus on Hip-hop, but if this is where God wanted me to be then let thy will be done Lord.

This project has not only transformed my project participants, but it also has transformed me—I would hope anything that utters God would transform (all) people. It was only after interviewing my project participants for our (postponed) documentary that everything came together. Their overall responses solidified the power of Hip-hop as being both spiritual and transformative because it showed me a side of them that was unlike our times together as a group. I was able to see a change and a growth in their speech and confidence, and reached the conclusion that they have been empowered and transformed.

I believe that the more we met together to discuss the spirituality of Hip-hop, the more they started to transform themselves in ways that they had not experienced before. As we remixed theology and danced to our ancestor's rhythms, we were feeding our soul while preserving and cultivating the culture.

Because our project was both voluntary and randomly selected, we were not expecting to get a lot of similar outcomes. However, when you take into consideration our location, the South Bronx, you have to remember that it is here where Hip-hop culture was birthed. Therefore, many of our participants, in one way or another, were involved in Hip-hop endeavors.

As previously mentioned, we had music producers, eMCees, b-boys and Zulu Nation members. Unlike the mainstream view of Hip-hop as only being rap music, this project represented all of the art forms encompassing Hip-hop, creating a much more dense and rich dialogue across the board.

That may have to do with the fact that all movements for justice have, as Dr. Peter Heltzel describes in his book *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service*

to the World, the characteristic of being “an ancient source of renewal.”³⁴ Much of this renewal comes from knowing that the dialogue in pursuit of justice is inter-generational and therefore speaks to all age demographics.

To make this project work, it was undoubtedly necessary to establish relationships with our elders and the pioneers of Hip-hop culture in order to secure their blessings. When those who are in transition of going back to meet the creator are in dialogue with young people (still fairly new to earth), it becomes awe inspiring and altogether empowering.

In fact, many of the interviews with our project participants reflected the lessons they had learned from their elders, reflected in their high level of maturity and knowledge. In the case of the project specifically, references to the Hip-hop Declaration of Spiritual Beliefs mixed with a commitment to doing justice proved to me Hip-hop’s ability to empower and create future leaders. After all, the goal is to create leaders of transformation so that when my generation is gone they can pick up where we left off.

That is the ultimate objective of the Micah Institute, hence my specific tract in *Faith-Rooted Organizing and Leadership for the Doctorate of Ministry*. This leadership is not for me to keep for myself but to transfer over to other people so that they can transform their own communities using their own gifts and talents—in this case, Hip-hop.

Despite our differences, our individual ways of expression all coincided through the artistic expressions of Hip-hop culture and its teachings of peace, love, unity, and having fun. But it is to the actions and thoughts of these Hip-hoppers that one should pay specific attention as history unfolds itself.

³⁴ Heltzel, Peter, *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2014).

Because Hip-hop culture has been so negatively portrayed it has not allowed for other voices to be heard on its behalf. And when you consider Hip-hop culture's genesis from young people coming together to protest, it is only fair that we hear from other young voices and not just the ones we see and hear on television.

One of my project participants described Hip-hop as the reason he has a high level of awareness of who he is and his role in the community. Self-awareness and self-knowledge, he said, are at the core of his being and Hip-hop is how he expresses those human characteristics.

As a member of the Universal Zulu Nation, these ideals were instilled in him since his initiation phase toward the movement. I also believe what makes this particular participant special is that his commitment to justice combined with his high level of intelligence shows that Hip-hop is in fact spiritual and will be here forever and ever. With only a high school education, this young twenty-year-old Bronx native has already been invited to speak at universities and is currently teaching workshops at a community center a few blocks away from the El Fogon Center for the Arts.

It is one thing to see his amazing break dancing moves, but it is a whole other spectacle to hear him speak, including eMCeeing. The same could be said about another participant, who sees Hip-hop as the revolution of our time. As a Christian, he easily made the connection between the Church and Hip-hop after reading my book (see Appendix A). However, after enveloping himself in the doctoral project, he began to see Hip-hop beyond the context of the Church, but as a grassroots movement much like Jesus' ministry in the streets. When Jesus is viewed from the vantage point of a

transitional space organizer for the community we create a blueprint for faith-rooted organizing.

While this participant acknowledged his non-involvement in church for quite some time now, he remained faithful, all the while mindful of the significance that the church plays because of Jesus Christ. As a firm believer, he feels the need to do the work of justice in order to feel the presence of God in his life.

Because justice is a continuing battle to be fought for, his involvement in community organizing initiatives has been enhanced now that Hip-hop has been projected to him from a spiritual light. What made this particular participant stand out was his Jesuit teachings as a full time student at Fordham University.

Not surprisingly, he spoke very much in the thinking of St. Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus. Our participant believed in God being present in Hip-hop because God is present in everything. When God is in everything, we treat everything the way we expect to be treated. That kind of spirituality is the reason why my one-day retreat on St. Ignatius at St. Rose of Lima was powerful (see Appendix G). It brought me back to the idea of transferring the power by acknowledging our experiences as Divine ones. If we all see God in everything, including each other, we bring a little heaven here on earth.

These kinds of vibrations are highly transferable when Hip-hop culture comes from a place of love. If love is what justice looks like in the public for Dr. Cornel West, then Hip-hop culture is a perfect example of that. That kind of love is contagious and it explains why we are continuing to see more prophetic voices being birthed.

This is why once again it was important to involve all age groups in this project. Whether it was watching our pioneers being interviewed by my project team or collaborating in performances in community events, their spiritual maturity and Hip-hop gifts showed the continuing spiritual trajectory of Hip-hop culture.

Art, dialogue, community, reflection, and service are great practical tools for spiritual growth and development. When examining both my project participants and prominent Hip-hop prophetic leaders, I cannot help but be proud of the direction that these young people are headed in. If they continue to move in this direction then they will easily add (or replace) the prophetic leaders of Hip-hop culture today.

A prime example of one of Hip-hop's prophets is KRS-ONE, whom I have mentioned frequently throughout my paper. This eMCee and philosopher, to me, embodies what it means to be Hip-hop. He is extremely intelligent, spiritual, and active in our global community.

KRS-ONE travels all over the world where he performs, speaks, and does humanitarian work as a Hip-hop edutainer. He has been given numerous honorary doctorates from various universities and is undoubtedly one of the best lyricists to ever touch the microphone. Whenever I hear KRS-ONE speak or rhyme, he has my undivided attention due to his warm, positive energy, love for Hip-hop, and extensive wisdom.

As someone who has witnessed the genesis of Hip-hop culture as a native Bronxian, KRS took the Hip-hop principles of peace, love, unity, and having fun very seriously and very literally. But at his core KRS-ONE is spiritual, having accepting God in his life a long time ago yet believing in multiple entrance points to spiritual enlightenment, with Hip-hop being one of those doors. With so many distractions in the

21st Century, KRS-ONE reminds us that Hip-hop can serve as a humbling experience because it uses the very basic forms of human expression to start intelligent dialogues, create communities of spiritual seekers, and to work toward justice.

There is so much that can be said about the spirituality of Hip-hop. As a spiritual seeker and leader myself, I would prefer the term spiritually-rooted organizing as opposed to faith-rooted organizing. At our March 23 event, one of our guest performers surprised me by calling out people to join him in a cipher to freestyle. While I did not intend on stopping him from putting this together unexpectedly, and despite our pre-arranged agenda for the evening, I was reminded of my own love for freestyling, my introduction to Hip-hop culture.

Free-styling is an improvisational form of rhyming, performed with few or no previously composed lyrics, which is said to reflect a direct mapping of the mental state and performing situation of the artist. It is non-scripted, non-rehearsed, uncut, and the rawest form of Hip-hop you can see and hear. A few of our project participants joined this improvisational act, which to me is one of the most gifted forms of Hip-hop artistry. For me, the best lyricists can freestyle, because to be able to rhyme on the spot and speak about consciously raising topics coherently is a gift.

In fact, freestyling in my research has been shown to resemble what the Pentecostal tradition in Christianity refers to as “speaking in tongues,” or *glossolalia*. This is a type of prayer or communicating with God that is associated with Pentecostal worship service.

In his book *Catholic Pentecostalism*, René Laurentin discusses how there are multiple ways of understanding the word *glossolalia*. He states that “in some of these

varied expressions the word “tongue” alone, without an accompanying verb, means the gifts of tongues, as in the Book of I Corinthians chapter 12 verse 10. He further goes to add that:

“*Glōssa* is likewise ambiguous, since it can mean ‘language’ in a very broad sense, that is, any kind of utterance [presumably intended for communication], as when we speak of the ‘language of animals.’ Or it can mean ‘language’ in the narrower sense of phonemes constructed into words and arranged according to a grammar.”³⁵

Trying to define speaking in tongues is as comprehensive a project as trying to describe the *experiences* that are felt when speaking in tongues. Nonetheless, in the Pentecostal tradition, “speaking in tongues” is not only viewed as a gift from God, but it is also another way of communicating with God on a more personal level. After all, it was St. Augustine who is accredited with saying that he who sings prays twice, so perhaps freestyling is the equivalent of praying three times as much.

This spiritual form of communication known as the art of eMCeeing can also be expressed in other Hip-hop cultural elements. Remember, the eMCee is nothing without the DJ who is the real crowd mover; much like the B-boy or B-girl creates her own Divine Space whenever he or she relives ancient tribal dances from Africa.

When it comes to graffiti art work, we can find many spiritual quotes and drawings alongside the walls of buildings in ghettos everywhere across the globe. But in this project specifically, it is the coming together of Hip-hoppers and non-Hip-hoppers alike that made this experience unique, in that it allowed for a plethora of expressions for further examination. Nowhere else is this kind of research being conducted for the purpose of creating an educational module for future generations to come. Therefore,

³⁵ René Laurentin, *Catholic Pentecostalism* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1977),

Hip-hop pedagogy can include spiritual growth for soul seekers no matter their faith background or lack thereof.

In keeping with the spirit of the prophet Isaiah (see chapter 3), the spirituality of Hip-hop in the context of faith-rooted organizing comes at a time when faith is being challenged in all four corners of our world. We are living in a time of much spiritual decay and moral constipation, a time in which the rich are getting richer and the poor are getting poorer.

As Hip-hoppers, we have so much going for us. We are artists in whose hands rest the responsibility of our future, something not to be taken lightly. As justice seekers speaking truth to power, our participants understand what they are up against, having recognized the economic disparities that exist between the rap music industry and Hip-hop culture, for example.

With so much being invested to glamorize Hip-hop's monetary success, one wonders if we have enough of the human power to counteract that negative stereotype. The truth is we will never know unless we try. Today, artists such as Immortal Technique are breaking down the traditional views of the young, mainstream Hip-hop artist.

Born in the country of Peru, Immortal Technique has shown the general public how successful one can be without the financial backings of a major record label. Because of his gifted lyrical skills mixed with his humanitarian aid all over the world, Immortal Technique has earned the reputation for being a younger KRS-ONE

Like KRS-ONE, Immortal Technique is a perfect example of what it means to be Hip-hop. If I could compare Immortal Technique to one of our greatest leaders of all

time it would be Malcolm X. He is extremely politically conscious and one of the most dynamic speakers in our Hip-hop community. Not only does he perform, he also speaks at universities and participates in other social justice movements such as the Occupy Wall Street Movement. With minimal formal education and a history of being incarcerated, this Harlem, New York native exemplifies not only a true Hip-hopper but a faith-rooted organizer—e.g., his involvement with joint Jewish-Islamic Palestinian organizations.

Another great example of Hip-hop at its purest form is Uncle Ralph McDaniels. Uncle Ralph McDaniels is the founder of the Video Music Box, which helped put rap music and Hip-hop culture on television screens across the United States. He became the eyes and ears of Hip-hop, allowing for the culture to spread by way of his interviews of countless artists along with his capturing of images of Hip-hop's cultural aesthetics.

Uncle Ralph essentially became one of Hip-hop's first archivists, where he has accumulated a vault of Hip-hop history that now spans thirty years. I was extremely blessed to have participated in many events celebrating this large milestone, having met Uncle Ralph McDaniels on several occasions.

In one conversation that I had with him he described his journey through Hip-hop as being spiritual because he spoke and met with so many artists to discuss their motivations and aspirations to contribute to the culture. In many cases, Hip-hop provided an alternative lifestyle and career opportunities for people who would have otherwise been sucked into a life of violence and possibly incarceration. Uncle Ralph McDaniels acknowledged to me that there was a spiritual presence in Hip-hop because it is transforming lives for the better, and despite its sometimes negative lyrics and imagery—

as projected in his short interview clips—it has been a source of self-healing and freedom.

I undoubtedly understood what Uncle Ralph McDaniels was saying, having had the opportunity to do the same when interviewing countless Hip-hoppers as part of my doctoral project. I found myself learning more about other people and myself the further I explored their purpose in relationship to Hip-hop, much as Ralph McDaniels did with artists in the past, many of whom are now successful and continue to represent Hip-hop spiritually. Artist such as Wu-Tang Clan, Common, MC Lyte and LL Cool J have all crossed paths with Uncle Ralph McDaniels' famous interviews, projecting images of young intelligent men and women who have embraced their purpose in life.

Purpose stands at the core of spirituality which is why it was a word that I continuously referenced throughout my doctoral project. Purpose also stands as the foundation upon which empowerment is conceived and later groomed.

When people begin to look at Hip-hop as purposeful they begin to change the way they project Hip-hop. This was particularly the case for those of our participants who were engaged in Hip-hop elements as a full time endeavor. The other participants either committed to Hip-hop on a part-time basis, or were simply avid supporters and observers. This is what also made our conversations interesting, in that some of our participants were involved in other professions while still being committed to the culture in some shape or form.

For example, one of our project participants was a former Wall Street employee who has recently invested all of his time (and money) in producing Hip-hop music and

artists. As a producer, he was looking for something to inspire him to come back into this culture despite his concern over the current state of Hip-hop.

With so much at stake, considering his role as a father and his single lifestyle, he was in search for answers to help bring the clarity that was necessary to help push him to pursue his Hip-hop dreams. I think this is what made our time together also very special in that I observed an interesting balance between the various Hip-hop endeavors as part of the transformation.

Because of this participant's unyielding pursuit to produce more positive music, an opportunity for the mentoring of some of our up and coming artists, based on the resources and experiences of our older participants, was created. These intergenerational partnerships allowed for long lasting relationships because of their common goals, goals which helped to build community. When young artist are given the proper resources and training, it helps deconstruct misconceptions about Hip-hop by providing opportunities for economic sustainability. That was the ultimate objective of our music producer participant, who not only quit his job to become economically independent but to pursue his passion and purpose.

This form of economic empowerment is necessary in the rebuilding of broken walls as indicated in the Book of Isaiah (see chapter 3) because it pushes us to break away from the dependence of others through patenting our own ideas. This has been one big downfall for Hip-hop, having been the victim of a corporate agenda. However, when Hip-hoppers are viewed as authoritative figures in their craft and allowed ownership in its development—particularly among young people—they are empowered, as they were putting together our March 23 event, for example (see Appendix D).

Active participants of my doctoral project, that is those producing the music, the rhymes/spoken messages, the dance, the art, and the venues for such expression, have had to empower themselves with certain skills in order to maintain Hip Hop culture. They had to discipline themselves—especially if this was their first time—to learn about their specific art and its production; they had to learn how to perform their art; they had to develop certain interpersonal communication skills in order to organize similar social events, dances and even freestyle battles. Through event organizing, they learned about handling money, recording the performances of the events, and selling CD's of such performances.

Specific skills learned by eMCees, for example, include how to write lyrics that rhymed; how to articulate those rhymes in a more meaningful way; how to present themselves at the microphone and on stage; how to work with the DJ and others organizing an event; after mainstream society took notice of this culture, how to interact with journalists; how to protect themselves legally when approached about business deals; and so forth. These participants, including those of the broader Hip-hop community, acquired certain skills, all of which empowered them and which they use now to navigate mainstream society and its institutions.

This form of empowerment becomes spiritual when the elements of faith are incorporated into the production of Hip-hop events, as this helps to bring together moral awareness combined with a deep sense of Divine exploration. Through productivity we see the works of an improvisational restorative justice that organically reshapes ministry into a model for the 21st Century.

Much of this comes from the delicate dance that is found in these small gatherings and events which help to foster both an emotional and intellectual experience. For example, one of our participants, a young African-American woman, expressed her anger and disappointment at living in a patriarchal world by writing lyrics that are intended to empower women in Hip-hop. Her anger was the reason she categorized herself as an eMCee that spoke on behalf of all struggling women, only adding fuel to her passion for Hip-hop and social justice.

Earlier, I mentioned very briefly the significance of emotion, but in the context of freestyling. As it relates to this doctoral project, I have encountered many instances of emotion in our dialogues, as, for example, in the tears that I saw in some people's eyes at our March 23 event.

One parent approached me before leaving and expressed her tears of joy as she listened to the performers speak about their purpose in Hip-hop culture. She told me they were tears of joy because she was happy to see people from her community express themselves in such a healthy way and that it brought hope to her teenage daughter whom she had brought with her.

As a lay minister, I utilize the element of eMCeeing to speak and to teach. As such, I recognize the emotional characteristic associated with eMCeeing because emotion brings to the audience a heart-felt need, or concern, to do something (as opposed to just saying something).

In his book *Spirituality and Human Emotion*, Robert C. Roberts argues that emotion is founded upon none other than a *concern*. In other words, Roberts believes that:

“The capacity to be affected emotionally is not only a characteristic of weak people but also of very strong ones. Churchill, Socrates, and the Apostle Paul were all strong people of deep feeling. It is in fact, among other things, that they are ‘driven’ by some passion or other—whether it be love of country, concern for intellectual and moral integrity, or the love of God”³⁶

As a Christian, I have heard many other Christians complement each other by saying: “That person has the Holy Spirit in them.” This statement acknowledges the fact that a particular person’s emotion is helping him or her to communicate God’s message. This understanding of the Spirit as being emotional is common among other faith believers, not excluding Hip-hoppers, especially those in my doctoral project. Based on my research, emotions can trigger spiritual experiences based on one’s pathology to express, experience, and reflect upon their own social reality.

In their book, *Why God Won’t Go Away*, Andrew Newberg, Eugene D’Aquili, and Vince Rause argue that religious and spiritual faith and practice will always exist in humanity because the brain is designed for spiritual and transcendent experience.³⁷ Through their research on brain activity, at the time of transcendent experience, they assert that specific activities cause the brain to function in a way where emotions are felt in enhanced and transcendent fashion.

Such activities include but are not limited to rhythmic physical motions and repetition (both in movements, spoken/heard words, and thoughts). This is how they explain the powerful mental and physical sensations experienced in a variety of activities

³⁶ Robert C. Roberts, *Spirituality and Human Emotion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982).

³⁷ D’Aquili, E., Newberg, A., and Rause, V., *Why God won’t go away* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2001).

such as prayer, meditation, attending a worship service, listening to music, or in reciting poetry.

The repetitions and rhythms involved in Hip-Hop music, lyrics, and dance, for example, can trigger the brain's activities which enhance emotional awareness and transcendent experiences. Subsequently, when Hip-Hop lyrics were presented to our participants for analysis and reflection, as part of our dialogues (see Appendix B), they theoretically enhanced the access to the content being addressed from merely intellectual to emotional and spiritual as well. Emotional healing, learning, and reflection are vital in the process of spiritual care and growth.

Spiritual care stands at the root of this entire project. While I stand clear as an advocate of the Hip-hop culture, if not duly noted already, my primary objective remains the care of the soul. If Hip-hop can serve as a medium for people to tap into their spirituality, which my research has shown it can, then I will continue to advocate for Hip-hop forever and ever.

This was important when working in a multi-faith context which Hip-hop culture represents in its entirety. Because the project focused primarily on spirituality and not religion, it was important that I prepared myself by attending conferences and meeting with people that focused on multi-faith initiatives.

As part of my ministerial competencies I participated in the following: The interfaith dialogue at Jewish Theological Seminary (see Appendix H); my interview with Imam Alfred Mohammed (see Appendix G); and the Interfaith leadership in America conference by Dr. Eboo Patel, the President of the Interfaith Youth Core (see Appendix F). All of these conversations and experiences, I concluded, have one thing in common:

trying to find the common language and social injustices that can help us collectively move forward together.

Despite their differences, faiths need to come together, much as Hip-hoppers need to come together frequently, in order to help break down these walls of division. As one speaker put it, we are living in a world where we have an adequate enough food supply and the educational resources that no human should be left behind.

In other words, there should be no excuse as to why there continues to be so many injustices, considering our common mantras of peace, love, justice, and spirituality. But when I consider my involvement in faith-rooted organizing initiatives like the Micah Institute (an initiative that comes out of our doctoral program), I feel I am participating in a movement that concerns itself more with finding a common language than it does the actual work at hand.

Because this multi-faith caucus serves to provide the faith community with an agenda for the new Mayor of New York City Bill DeBlasio, creating a document that speaks to all faiths has been challenging in more ways than a few. In fact, setting up the monthly meetings alone has been challenging due to the fact that some have complained that the future dates do not reflect all religious holidays.

Additionally, not all faiths were represented at the table, making the agenda only representative of the major religions—Islam, Christianity and Judaism. As a member of the Millennial generation (see Chapter 3), I felt disappointed attending a lot of these multi-faith gatherings because I felt it represented another “business as usual” agenda. With only elders present and no young people, it appeared to be more of a personal

religious agenda then a communal one. Here, I saw the same dynamics that had pushed me away from the church.

I experienced so much hypocrisy in the church that I chose to do my project outside of its walls in the broader community. I felt I had received little appreciation while working in ministry as a young man of color, having expected much more encouragement considering the negative statistics that come with being male, a person of color, and worst of all, educated. I no longer felt needed or appreciated in a place that was supposed to provide me with spiritual care and empowerment. Furthermore, the thought of bringing a Hip-hop and spirituality ministry or curriculum to faith based communities stirred up much controversy, with many unable to break with the lingering perception of Hip-hop as demonic and sac-religious.

Then I started to think back on how even Jesus Christ was rejected by clergy. How even with His good intentions he was viewed as a threat to not only religion but the status quo. This form of public theological testimony is one that challenged the traditional forms of connecting with God by confronting the wrong that existed within them.

Much like the wrong that is being felt in faith based communities that are dying alongside a clergy who hide in their ivory towers, there is a critique of a hegemonic class of faith leaders and their affiliations with politicians that raises eye brows in this generation. This view of religious hierarchy is what is currently pushing a lot of our young people away from participating in faith related endeavors, as they do not want to pollute their own soul with lies and disappointments.

Because of the limitations that were placed on me when I served in my last church position, I decided to bring all that was taught to me to the streets. That is the only place that has truly accepted me—flaws and all. Since Hip-hop was birthed in the streets and remains a street culture, it is only natural that I use her to help me and the people that I serve.

This is where I see God's spirit moving now at this time. With so much that is challenging institutionalized religion today, I can only see this as the *kairos* moment for a change and my doctoral project has proven that a change is coming.

With the Spirit of God constantly in motion, one can only imagine the kinds of spiritual creativity that will come from our young people once they are put in a position to lead. So when people ask me why I continue to work with our youth my answer is simple: they are one day going to be taking care of us!

More importantly, however, if Hip-hop culture is dominating the youth landscape today, then we need to pay attention to what is happening right now before our very own eyes. The truth of the matter is Hip-hop culture can be found in every facet of our nation including sports, academia, psychology, fashion, and diplomacy, to name a few.

This should come as no surprise considering Hip-hop's legacy of reinventing everything that comes in its path. This is very important to understand because it brings us back to the first chapter, which focused on Hip-hop as a verb rather than a noun. Hip-hop only works when it is in motion, much like the spirit that flows through it. When this is understood, those that come into contact with Hip-hop and embraces it as a lifestyle and way of being ride a much higher wave than the rest of the ocean.

I can surely say this with conviction based on my time with these young people. No matter their background, education, and circumstances in life, Hip-hop is changing them as much as it is changing me.

With so much more to do, I am hoping that this project can serve as a tool for future generations forever and ever. Like the prophet Isaiah, Hip-hop is called to call back all of its members of the community to prepare for its future, and the only way to make that happen is to recharge its spiritual battery. The soul of Hip-hop, much like that of any other human being, requires a lot of self care, love, and of course peace and unity. It requires the gifts, talents, and time from everyone to defeat its spiritual decay.

With Hip-hoppers present all over the world the possibilities become endless. And, unlike the above mentioned multi-faith gatherings I attended in which language and personal agendas overrode the common cause, Hip-hop does not need to fall into those semantics because the commonality is Hip-hop.

A month into my doctoral project I was invited by my then adviser to participate in an exclusive gathering at the Schomburg Center in Harlem, New York. The Schomburg center has always been an advocate for Hip-hop considering its deep rooted mission in African-American Studies. This meeting was organized by Hip-hop pioneer and archivist Martha Diaz, who founded the Hip-hop Education Center at New York University.

Martha Diaz is another prime example of what it means to be Hip-hop because she does not simply talk about it, but lives it thoroughly. Because of Martha Diaz, many Hip-hop artists have been granted opportunities to speak in various academic settings, allowing for a dialogue between institutionalized education and street wisdom.

I was very honored to be a part of this and to be in the presence of so many great Hip-hop legends, such as the previously mentioned Uncle Ralph McDaniels, and James Top, a legendary graffiti artist. Also present were members of the Universal Zulu Nation, scholars, activists, journalists, and college students, just to name a few. With so many people from diverse professional backgrounds, this gathering of like-minded individuals showed the expansion of Hip-hop and cemented the fact that Hip-hop is not going anywhere.

The purpose of this gathering was to discuss the preservation of Hip-hop culture and its future as a global force. With Hip-hop now crossing over multiple generations, it was time to reflect on Hip-hop's endeavors beyond its entertainment to its edutainment.

As I looked around this room I could not help but see the diversity of races, professions, ages, genders, and religious backgrounds that represented Hip-hop culture. This visibility of diversity is very important in the Hip-hop community because if we are to move forward together then we need to make sure that the diverse community that was there at its inception is represented today.

In this meeting, all were given equal opportunity to voice their opinions about a culture they so love. With so much to discuss and with limited time to do it, people left with more questions than they did answers. Consequently, no real tangible outcomes came out of this dialogue other than the general consensus that Hip-hop culture is no longer a baby, but an adult that needs to grow up.

This was also a common theme for our participants, who were not all that versed in Hip-hop's history. As with the history of anything else, its people need to evolve with

it. But this is not just limited to the physical evolution of a person, but also the evolution of its spirit.

When embarking on the spiritual path I believe it is important to acknowledge your flaws and hurdles as necessary points of reflection and continuing growth. Reflection was necessary when embarking on this project endeavor, having now been able to measure the old me with the new one.

I posed the same question to my project participants who were asked to reflect on their personal trials and tribulations as part of their involvement in Hip-hop endeavors. This is why evaluations before and after the project were necessary to try to measure transformative outcomes. Much like the prophet Isaiah who was called by Yahweh to reflect upon the duties and responsibilities that the Ancient Israelites have as spiritual dwellers and justice seekers, Hip-hop is called to act and reflect on its current state as well as on its past and future.

Because spirituality requires us to transform our own lives and that of others, the Hip-hop community is no exception to this rule. Therefore, it is important that I address some of the same problems that continue to plague Hip-hop, and that were made visible throughout this project.

For example, the female voice continues to be dominated by men, as was the case in our dialogues and more broadly speaking in Rap music. In the latter case, women are seen as objects, often portrayed as such in music videos. Not to mention women in Hip-hop, like Martha Diaz, do not receive the recognition that they deserve considering their relentless efforts in preserving the culture.

As it relates to my project, one of our female participants was displeased that I had invited only male speakers to our first gathering while another female felt her voice could not compete with those of the men during our group discussions, which is why she told me she was silent throughout most of our time together. While she admitted to me a slight disadvantage because of her broken English, she did not feel comfortable enough to speak on a subject she was not too familiar with.

I personally regret not bringing in female guest speakers to join our group discussions, as there are plenty of qualified women who could have added to these important conversations. Women such as Tricia Rose, professor of African-American studies at Brown University, a huge advocate of Hip-hop culture. Another example is Nene Ali, a spoken word artist from the Bronx.

This young artist is a great example of how Hip-hop transforms our youth considering her vast knowledge and social justice background in her respective community. I have had the pleasure of collaborating with her on past events and she has impressed me every single time with her performances and eloquent speeches. Needless to say, both of the women involved in my doctoral project discontinued their participation. And while they claimed this was due to other reasons, one still wonders.

Nonetheless, as a lay minister, faith-rooted organizer, and Hip-hopper I recognize the significance of all parties present because all are God's children. More importantly, as a spiritual leader, I highlight the female presence in Hip-hop culture much like religion acknowledges her presence in faith—e.g. the Virgin Mary in Christianity and the female goddess Shakti in Hinduism.

The feminine energy in spirituality is extremely important considering the role of women as both care givers and nurturers. In the context of Hip-hop culture, my research has shown this ongoing commitment of females to preserve and elevate Hip-hop because of its ability to provide safe spaces for our young people. In other words, they recognize the potential that Hip-hop has to care for our community if used properly. Additionally, when you consider the high absence of father figures in communities of color, it becomes even more important to have the presence of women in Hip-hop culture to help fill that void.

The more we continue to suppress the female voice in Hip-hop culture (and in the world at large) the more difficult it will become to develop the spirituality of future generations to come. If Hip-hop culture claims to be about peace, love, unity, and having fun, then those same principles need to be applied to our women, especially when you consider their ongoing contributions to the culture that they so love.

Another concern that I see in Hip-hop culture is its over use of the word *movement*. I myself am guilty of this because at my core I truly believe Hip-hop to be a movement—an intelligence movement, as KRS-ONE likes to call it. However, based on my research findings, the culture continues to be a scattered movement with no real leadership. With so many organizations and artist all over the world, there is no place for them to gather, let alone communicate with each other.

Unfortunately, the true leadership in Hip-hop has been handed over to corporations who are not only destroying the culture by way of Rap music, but also dividing the Hip-hop community between the haves and have-nots. Ironically, we see much of the Hip-hop elite sticking together, but I cannot say the same for everyone else.

As a result, too many egos (Edging God Out) are visible on both sides of the argument, putting Hip-hop culture in a position to not be transformed and grow up. While I will acknowledge that Hip-hop as a movement is more visible and making small strides at a more local level, ego should not be the reason that these groups continue to work independently as opposed to cooperatively.

Lastly, Hip-hop culture has no physical structure to commemorate its longstanding global impact, especially at its birthplace, the Bronx. Considering the multi-billion dollar wealth that Hip-hop culture has accumulated over the course of its existence, you would think a once oppressed community would fight to erect a symbol of its success and triumph.

Furthermore, why has it been so difficult to put together a committee or organization that can produce some sort of Hip-hop museum that is permanent and accessible to the community? Ironically enough, Cornell University houses the biggest Hip-hop archive in the world, not to mention the fact that Hip-hop is taught in various colleges and universities throughout the country. At this stage in the game, there should be no reason for Hip-hop not to have a collegiate level institution for higher learning where people from all over the world can learn its history, art forms and entrepreneurial spirit.

While these concerns still linger in my mind as a Hip-hopper myself, I also take into consideration the countless attempts people and organizations have made, especially concerning the role of women in Hip-hop. The fact that a woman is leading the effort toward solidarity and social agency gives hope for the future of Hip-hop culture. What Martha Diaz and so many other Hip-hoppers from around the world are doing serves as a

reminder that the social spiritual movement is never at rest but always in (Hip-hop) motion.

I have been very blessed to see how Hip-hop culture is moving people in the right direction because they have taken a vow—whether they recognize it or not—that many spiritual leaders in the past have also taken. These vows are reflected in the kind of work that they do for the community, which has led me to believe that Hip-hop has a soul. Many organizations under the banner of Hip-hop are providing empowering opportunities for young people through education, prison ministries, and artist development programs, just to name a few. These kinds of commitment make Hip-hop part of a lineage of transformation and justice that makes it unlike any other genre that has existed before.

As someone who follows the spiritual path of Christianity, I firmly believe that at one point in our history Jesus Christ walked this earth and added to this ongoing tradition of spiritual transformation. I admire this historical figure because, according to the ancient book, he was tempted for forty days by the devil with having anything that he wanted in this world, but refused and so began his ministry in the streets amongst the poor and the suffering. This commitment to servitude over materialism is what made Jesus the transformational leader that he continues to be today. He reminds us that when people take up the mission to care for the soul over the physical they will move mountains.

I am also reminded of how, according to the Hebrew text, Moses spent forty years in the wilderness before reaching the Promised Land filled with milk and honey. During that forty year exploration Yahweh challenged the people of Moses much like the devil

challenged Jesus. Yahweh knew that He would fulfill His promise but He tested the people to see if they were worthy of this new terrain.

Yet, Moses remained resilient. Having had many opportunities to do something else as an oratory genius and future pharaoh, he decided to accept the call from Yahweh by walking amongst the poor and disenfranchised of his community.

I myself, having many opportunities to do other things for my own self-gratification, have also taken this vow to work for justice and to transform communities. After this project, I can say the same thing about countless other Hip-hoppers whom I have encountered throughout my journey. There is a passion, a fire, a sense of responsibility that lingers over the hearts and minds of young people who see Hip-hop as providing purpose in their lives.

Every day they struggle with the temptations of the world; they see it in the videos, hear it on the radio, and read it on the face of street billboards all over the city. Yet they remain committed to the fight for social justice, spiritual revolution, and the ongoing pursuit for peace, love, unity, and having fun.

Jesus and Moses, two spiritual leaders, experienced a significant transformation related to the number forty in the Judeo-Christian Bible—a number spiritually significant because it represents the beginning of something new. Another primary example of this is the great Old Testament flood where God instructed Noah to build an ark that would sustain him, along with all of the animals of the world and his family, for forty years. Once those forty years was completed, God secured his covenant with us through a rainbow as a sign of his promise of a new beginning.

The Mayans (my ancestors) also understood the significance of this spiritual shift when they predicted the world's new beginning—and not its end as the media portrayed it—on December 21, 2012. Their calendar predicted a change in mental and spiritual consciousness that will be felt in the coming years and beyond. Because I do not believe in coincidences, I do not find it ironic that this research project was conducted at the same time Hip-hop culture was celebrating its fortieth year of existence. With so many events to celebrate, including that of our own, I think it might be fair to say that we have made it to our promised land—our new beginning.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

New York Theological Seminary

Demonstration Project Proposal

|
Doctor of Ministry Program

Walter Lizandro Hidalgo-Olivares, M.A.

HIP-HOP, SPIRITUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT
Utilizing Hip-hop Culture as a Medium to Create Spaces of Social and Spiritual Transformation

By

Walter Lizandro Hidalgo-Olivares

|

DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

New York Theological Seminary

February 1, 2013

Challenge Statement

Hip-hop culture's birthplace is in the South Bronx which is also the home of El Fogon Center for the Arts—the community in which I serve. With over twenty-two years' experience in Hip-hop culture and twelve years' of experience in lay leadership, I have found that youth and young adults ages 18-24 are strongly influenced by negative lyrical content found in Rap music creating a spiritual crisis. The predicament ultimately affects the future of the youth, community and Hip-hop culture in a negative way. This demonstration project will create a public awareness campaign that will teach this demographic the original intentions of Hip-hop for the purposes of encouraging this population to stay true to its original purpose.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING
“In the Beginning, there was Hip-hop”

El Fogon Center for the Arts is situated in the Bronx—one of five boroughs that make up the City of New York. Its mission is to expose the profound issues and ideas of our time (past, present and future) by expanding the boundaries of artistic practice. It is a small space that celebrates diversity of the human experience and expression by creating a platform for music, art, dialogue and education.

The center is located on 989 Home Street, which is known by many as the South Bronx. The South Bronx is a multicultural, multiethnic and multigenerational cross-road with a rich history. According to the 2010 consensus, the Bronx has about 1.4 million inhabitants with a rapidly growing second and third generation population in its south side district. This section of the Bronx is known as the sixteenth congressional district which has the highest poverty rate in the United States.¹

This disproportionate level of unemployment, income, education and overall social disparity affected the landscape of the Bronx, a byproduct from the mass post war urban exodus of the 1950's and the post-Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's. Today, the Bronx finds itself in similar sociological challenges when you consider the high rates

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, *2010 New York 17 Congressional District*, <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/popmap/ipmtext.php?fl=36:3617>, Accessed July 27, 2012.

of stop and frisk reports from “minority” groups by the New York Police Department,² and, its ongoing battle with poor school systems.

But it was here where Hip-hop was born; on the tongues of globalized, transnational, urban poor bodies in de-industrialized and divested spaces. It organically created spaces for disenfranchised youth of the African Diaspora to amplify their concerns surrounding the social, economic and political realities of their lives as it relates to their broader social context.

And so the Bronx became the platform where Hip-hop was utilized as a medium to express the sociological concerns of the 1970’s—the birth of Hip-hop—the 1980’s (my generation) and the 1990’s. Many of these concerns resulted in the internal displacement of families due to poor urban planning, and, the racist/xenophobic milieu that came from large waves of immigrants of distinct ethnic backgrounds moving in and around the South Bronx.

This influx of people and planning is what brought DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, founder of the Zulu Nation³ and DJ Grandmaster Flash together to independently (yet cooperatively) create what would later be called Hip-hop. Their artistic expression(s) helped to create an improvisational platform that organically developed into public discourses that created awareness and empowered marginalized communities.

² Robert Stolarik. “Stop and Frisk Policy – New York City Police Department,” *New York Times*, http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/s/stop_and_frisk/index.html (accessed October 18, 2012).

³ Afrika Bambaataa. “The History of the Universal Zulu Nation,” *Youtube*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vq1ONZ7R6IQ> (accessed on October 19, 2012).

South Bronx born, KRS-ONE - eMCee, edutainer and pioneer - is another witness to Hip-hop cultures evolution as a first hand witness to this revolution. He talks about its history and his experiences in a similar fashion:

A product of cross-cultural integration, rap is deeply rooted within ancient African cultures and oral traditions. Hip-hop is believed to have originated in the Bronx by a Jamaican DJ named Kool Herc. Kool Herc's style of deejaying (DJ-ing) involved reciting rhymes over instrumentals. At house parties, Kool Herc would rap with the microphone, using a myriad of in-house references. Duplicates of Kool Herc's house parties soon drifted through Brooklyn and Manhattan. Kool Herc and other block party DJ's helped spread the message of hip-hop around town and spawned tons of followers.⁴

Hip-hop's uniqueness is exhibited in its core/fundamental beliefs, principles and values which include, but are not limited to: graffiti, B-boying and B-girling dances, DJ-ing, eMCing and knowledge known as "elements". While Hip-hop was born in the Bronx, Hip-hop would not have evolved without the valuable contributions of talented individuals who came from other parts of New York City and its surrounding areas.

Now in its fourth decade, Hip-hop has matured and it's an undeniable fact that it is acknowledged globally as a platform/tool for change, expression and transformation. There are many critical conversations that are occurring to address how the exploitation of Rap music has miseducated, misinformed and mislead our youth thus keeping them away from the essence and history of Hip-hop. It was at the latter end of my high school years when I became consciously aware and fascinated with the ability that Hip-hop had to organically develop coalitions, collectives and communities anchored through spreading messages of love, hope and empowerment .

⁴ Henry Adaso, ed., "A Brief History of Hip-Hop and Rap," *About.Com: Rap/Hip-hop*, [Database on-line]; available from <http://www.about.com>; Internet; Accessed 8 December 2008.

Rap music is a byproduct of Hip-hop, which has become a global economic engine. Because of it being driven by a corporate agenda that is not aligned with the tenants of Hip-hop culture it has contributed to the negative perceptions that exist today. As a result, Rap's evolution, particularly at the turn of the 21st Century, has become the face of Hip-hop. While eMCeeing remains one of the foundational pillars of Hip-hop, it's rapid transition into Rap aesthetics has resulted in the hijacking of the consciousness raising lyrics that was highly favored and valued during Hip-hop's Golden Era in the late 1980's to mid-1990's. In order to bring back a focus to the original intentions of Hip-hop, a Public Awareness Campaign and Strategy to educate the general public has to be developed and implemented. This initiative's mission will be to create an awareness about Hip-hop culture and what it means to be a Hip-hoppa. This is particularly relevant to the communities in the Bronx, and subsequently, to the youth ages 18-24 who live and reside there. One of the best ways to achieve this goal will be through facilitating intergenerational conversations and dialogues that will bring the experiences and voices of Hip-hop pioneers to the forefront. This will include other "unknown" and "unsung" contributors to its genesis and evolution. By approaching the challenge in this way, we will be able to make an innovative and unique contribution to an emerging Hip-hop Renaissance that is occurring by aligning the social and spiritual trajectories that binds the Hip-hop community together.

This public awareness campaign and strategy will utilize an approach that will incorporate experiential and interactive educational modalities that will result in a better understanding of Hip-hop culture and it being an asset for social and spiritual transformation.

I've personally have experienced and have been witness to this transformative power at work through Hip-hop gatherings that I have attended and participated as B-boy DJ and eMCee. This is a contributing factor and reinforcement to my confidence that this can and will be reproduced now in my academic and scholarly work. As such, given the geographical location of El Fogon in the South Bronx and its mission to promote artistic expression and cultural diversity, it is only fitting that we utilize this communal space and venue.

CHAPTER 2
PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE
“The Misconception of the Art... and the Culture”

By the early 1990’s there were multiple conversations and dialogues occurring that took into consideration Hip-hop, its future and its potential to generate a lot of money. The realization of this is where Hip-hop culture and Rap music splintered. On the one hand, the corporate and executive agenda was anchored around capitalistic growth and potential. At the grass-roots level this evolving cultural phenomenon was seen for its potential to empower and mobilize millions into developing, forging and promoting self-sustaining communities.

The negative perception of Hip-hop, however, has been promulgated by a corporate mandate that has supported images of misogyny and materialism. This ideological shift because of “Hip-hop vs. Rap music” has severely damaged the integrity of Hip-hop from a cultural perspective thus contributing to its negative perceptions and being interpreted as another secular musical genre. The importance and potential for the rebuilding and redevelopment of decaying neighborhoods was replaced with platinum chains, and songs like “U.N.I.T.Y” by eMCee Queen Latifah were replaced with songs like “Five Star Chick” by Rapper Yo Gotti.

The packaging of Rap Music in this way not only has degraded the general public’s view of Hip-hop *culture*, but it continues to influence the impressionable attitudes, behaviors and mindsets of its biggest consumer, our youth and young adults.

The majority of Rap Music's audience consists of our youth and college students, making them the primary focus by corporations' decision to utilize it as a tool for marketing sex, spreading negative lyrical content and promoting material wealth in the name of Hip-hop. Consequently, Rap Music's association with Hip-hop has done more to maintain a cyclical pattern of moral decay as it continues to be fueled with a particular type of artist and song(s) while filtering out all of the good that exists within Hip-hop culture.

Because of Hip-hop's global influence and growing popularity, this corporate approach of "doing" Hip-hop continues to affect the Hip-hop community by first demonizing it to our youth. If corporations continue to allow these "rappers" to disrespect women, for example, with their actions and lyrics, it will further add to the challenges that are associated with growth development in teens around issues such as identity and social acceptance. And in young adults, seeking a higher education has its road blocks because a majority of our schools continue to ignore Hip-hop's local and global contributions to our meta-narrative.

These individual concerns become more nuanced when you factor in the ongoing decline in numerous after school programs (specifically in the arts) in high schools. This becomes even more staggering when we take into consideration the ever decreasing youth and young adult presence and/or participation in communities of faith and ministry.⁵ In both instances, the end result is clear: our younger population has a lot of free time to listen to Rap music, not Hip-hop.

⁵ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church - and Rethinking Faith*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2011).

Given the aforementioned challenges, Hip-hop, at the eve of its fortieth year of existence, is put in a position to begin rethinking its contribution locally and globally. What this means is, although the decision by a group of Hip-hoppers in the early 1990's was to make Hip-hop as a means to generate revenue, it does not have to be the case for the next forty years or more.

I, now thirty years of age, am a byproduct of Hip-hop culture having been born in the early stages of Hip-hop (1980's) and later participating in the movement during its "golden age" (1990's). Like many before me and after me, I first saw Hip-hop as another avenue of entertainment and wealth accumulation. But that perception was altered the more I began surrounding myself with people and organizations who were utilizing the culture for change. Additionally, my experiences in writing lyrics as an eMCee raised my level of consciousness and sensitivity to another plateau that neither school nor Church successfully was able to provide to me.

EMCee's such as KRS-ONE, Rakim and the Wu-Tang Clan, to just name a few, became unofficial teachers, counselors and spokespersons that provided the spiritual food that fed my soul. It provided this platform that helped link my awareness of self (using lyrics as a medium to convey knowledge) with my spiritual ancestors that I so longed wrestled with throughout my adolescent and early adulthood years. In my experiences, Hip-hop's transformative power organically produced places of reflection and vulnerability whenever it allowed me the opportunity to speak publicly about my fears and hopes without ever feeling that I was being judged or persecuted.

This pivotal point in my life created a sense of awareness that eventually developed into this feeling of purpose and duty. This revelation helped me to develop my

spirituality by aligning myself with like-minded people who represented the consciousness building and spiritual influences of the Hip-hop community. Many were using Hip-hop as means to empower marginalized communities by developing their own spiritual identity in an effort to create self-sustaining communities. They put the forgotten fifth element of Hip-hop, *knowledge*,⁶ at the forefront of the culture creating productive members of our society. What I and countless others experienced over the course of Hip-hop's history needs to be documented in an effort to counteract the spiritual crises that is plaguing the Hip-hop community.

This project will connect and trace Hip-hop's multiplicity of trajectories that make-up its forty year journey to be documented, archived and used as means to educate, empower and establish its validity for self, spiritual and social transformation—that were there since its inception—so that Hip-hop culture can fulfill the aspirations and purpose of our ancestors and pioneers. Through this, we can begin to educate and raise awareness and consciousness surrounding the origination of the culture as it is seen through the eyes of its pioneers and other stakeholders. In this way, we can train and empower future generations of inspiring Hip-hoppas to realize the potential to be agents of social change as opposed to Hip-hop being just a vehicle for monetary gains.

This project will establish conditions and an incredible opportunity for new theological approaches and views to experience the Divine by utilizing Hip-hop's Elements. This will hopefully result in drawing our youth and young adults into a more intimate relationship with The Creator and The Divine. By placing our youth at the

⁶Isaura Betzabe Pulido, *Knowledge-The Fifth Element of Hip Hop Music: Mexican and Puerto Rican Youth Engagement of Hip Hop as Critically Rac(ed) Education Discourse*, (Ann Arbor, MI: ProQuest, UMI Dissertation Publishing, 2011).

center of our theological discourses and making them our priority will be better equip us (theologians and scholars) in helping them in making sound decisions and in how they can use their talents to empower themselves and their community. After all, ministry is the Church, *in action*.

As a Christian, I recognize the transformative power that is found in Hip-hop, but more specifically, its spiritual path to connect other people of distinct religious, theological, socio-economical and sexual origins. From a broader spectrum, however, my foundation rests upon creating an ecumenical or multi-faith (or lack thereof) spaces of inclusivity and dialogue as that is what I see spirituality to both mean and to be practiced.

The perception that Rap music personifies for our mainstream demographic creates a feeling of resentment and distrust towards our youth and young adult Hip-hoppers, many of which are in fact utilizing Hip-hop for the social change and conscious catalyst that it is. This false perception or narrow view of Hip-hop becomes reciprocal in institutionalized places of faith that deem Hip-hop as altogether evil due to this misunderstanding.

Yes, both sides need to workout their differences in order to move forward collectively. From the context of Hip-hop, we, the Hip-hop community, recognize the moral and ethical concerns that are in large part fueled by Rap music. Similarly, from the construct and perspective of religious institutions, we also need to recognize the fallibility and distrust that Hip-hoppas have as outsiders looking in. Because there are fingers that can be pointed on both sides and religion is no different, there needs to be an open and equitable dialogue that can address these issues as a means to work collectively for the betterment of the future and continued care of our children and the community.

Today, for example, the overarching growing problem within institutionalized Churches, specifically mainstream Churches, is its declining attendance and participation. Its staggering numbers are enough to concern both Hip-hoppas and non-Hip-hoppas alike. In a recent article released by the Star Tribune they found that 20% of the adult population in the U.S. (that's 46 million people) have no religious affiliation including many of those who have decided to reject their faith altogether.⁷ For me, this is very scary not because they are not involved in a religion per se, but it's because there is a loss of hope, an overwhelming distrust and feeling of non-acceptance dominates the sentiments of countless human beings who place their energies in spaces of transformation that are supposed to be feeding their soul.

Consequently, if given the platform, Hip-hop can serve as the bridge that connects us inter-generationally and inter-culturally if and when communities of faith take the time to familiarize themselves with its history and the people/organizations that are already shaping the lives of our young people because of its spiritual power. On a macro level, these spaces of transformation will help us to deconstruct the negative stereotypes that are associated with Rap music the more they are duplicated all over the country, and all over the world.

As such, what we are able to create is more opportunities for people of faith, including other individuals and organizations that work with youth and young adults, to work together. In this way, the transformative power of Hip-hop can be integrated into

⁷ Rose French, "Fastest Growing Group in Religious Circles? The 'Nones,'" *Startribune.com*, October 15, 2012, <http://www.startribune.com/174127941.html>. (accessed on October 17, 2012).

civic dialogue, political engagement, research, community service hours, curriculum, mission trips, retreats and methods of empowerment.

All of my Site Team members have in one way or another actively participated and/or experienced firsthand Hip-hop culture at work. Additionally, all Site Team members agree that music, in this case Hip-hop, can be used to empower youth and young adults while simultaneously serving as a tool to develop one's own spiritual core without the dependency of traditional methods or institutions—i.e. the Church.

In large part, we are informing the general public that Hip-hop's focus is in fact to create systemic change and to develop an alternative "path-way" if-you-will to create, enhance or reconcile a robust relationship with the Creator. Ergo, in order to create this systemic change we would first have to begin by educating the general population, including the Hip-hop community, regarding the *original* intentions of Hip-hop. We will also make the broader social connection that comprises the Hip-hop community by having events and distributing surveys. In the end, the youth and young adults who are involved in this project will become knowledgeable of Hip-hop's history and aware of its spiritual influences upon those who encounter it. All members of the Site Team, with the exception of my editor, Evans Erilus, will be involved in this process by guiding me and my team with constant support and evaluation based on their respective gifts and talents.

Need Part 1:

To begin, we would first have to place the pioneers of Hip-hop at the center of the dialogical and communal discourses of Hip-hop culture and music by recording their stories into a short public awareness documentary. This documentary will include performances, interviews and data that we've accumulated throughout this process.

Interviewees will include artists, organizations, educators, activists, clergy, etc. so we can include all voices into the Hip-hop historical meta-narrative. In this way, we will discover new ways in which those generations will be able to communicate with each other having now discovered their overlapping relationships with the Hip-hop culture, and, how that will maintain viable links in building community(s) of transformation and faith. My Site Team member Steve Crawley will be directing this piece of the project. We will also have a young inspiring film director, Timmy Jacobs, who I've worked with in my youth programs, to help provide visual support. We will also secure a team that will help us market and promote this documentary to show at other locations in addition to El Fogon Center for the Arts. El Fogon will also serve as our foundation for survey distribution, workshops, dialogues, networking and research.

Need Part 2:

The next phase is the experience. El Fogon will serve as the platform to expose this socio-spiritual "experience" to the South Bronx community (and beyond). Through the help of a team, we will have an event entitled "Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment" in early 2013. Members of the team will be guided and directed by Site Team member Alba Mota because her numerous experiences in creating events include promotion, aesthetics, agenda and the proper use of media and technology.

CHAPTER 3
PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION
“When Rubber meets the Road”

Goal 1 – To implement a public awareness campaign and strategy of South Bronx residents between the ages of 18-24 about the negativity that is associated with Rap music, a byproduct of Hip-hop culture.

Strategy 1: Assemble a Focus Group of about 10-12 people between the ages of 18-24 who are from the South Bronx (and from the surrounding communities) to take part in a pre-survey (to measure their competency level on Hip-hop’s history) and to take part in a discussion with notable Hip-hop pioneers for a communal dialogue. This will take place in El Fogon.

Strategy 2: Invite the group to read my book, *Beyond the Four Walls: The Rising Ministry and Spirituality of Hip-hop*, with a follow-up discussion at El Fogon.

Strategy 3: Invite the group to attend the Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment event as observers as well as participants will journal their thoughts and experiences.

Evaluation of Goal 1: A post-evaluation questionnaire will be distributed to the entire group and will serve as data summarizing their experiences as well as measuring their awareness of Hip-hop’s socio-spiritual

influences. Over 75% of participants (Focus Group) will be able to demonstrate a newer socio-historical outlook on Hip-hop's original intentions and positive impacts.

Goal 2 – Develop a team of five people (called “Project Team”) who will help design a public awareness campaign about the positive and spiritual elements of Hip-hop culture and music.

Strategy 1: Have a retreat to talk and reflect on what it means to be spiritual and a leader. This will take place at the Yippie museum Café in downtown Manhattan.

Strategy 2: Have a dialogue around my book and critique it. This will take place at El Fogon.

Strategy 3: Have the team help put together the Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment event. They will help us plan, promote, recruit volunteers and interested performers. Some of our volunteers will also be performing and engaging with the audience themselves.

Evaluation of Goal 2: The team will take a post-evaluation questionnaire which will include a reflection paper describing their time together throughout this project. This reflection paper will include their thoughts and feedback regarding Hip-hop's transformative spiritual power.

Goal 3 – Design a platform that will demonstrate Hip-hop's original intentions and purpose.

Strategy 1: Put together a short public awareness campaign documentary that exposes Hip-hop's socio-spiritual and transformative power. The documentary

will consist of interviews, performances and statistics based on our survey distribution. This documentary will be shown at El Fogon as well as a few interested churches.

Strategy 2: Have an event entitled Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment to take place at El Fogon. This event will invite the community to get to know some artists and organizations that represent the origin of Hip-hop. Live performances, dialogue and networking opportunities will be available to all who come through El Fogon's doors.

Evaluation of Goal 3: Over 75% of our target audience will have both their consciousness and awareness raised surrounding Hip-hop's history and positivity.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH QUESTIONS
“Asking the Right Questions”

Biblical/Theological

When we examine closely the Prophet Isaiah in the First Testament, there appears to be a calling for a restorative justice amongst the ancient Israelites. How does one interpret this proclamation in the Book of Isaiah chapter 58 verse 12 as it relates to Hip-hop’s culture? How does Hip-hop culture embody this restorative nature and how can it revitalize its ancient ruins when we consider the negative lyrical content that Rap, a byproduct of the Hip-hop culture, produces via songs and music videos?

Socio-Historical

Hip-hop has a history that spans over four decades with its genesis in the South Bronx. This historical phenomenon has evolved over the years and has impacted many individuals and communities in the United States and in the world. What is Hip-hop and why is it important to know its history? How can learning its past help us to create change in the future? What kinds of contributions has Hip-hop had to our society to be considered a necessary medium for social transformation?

Spiritual

The theologian, Father Roger Haight, defined spirituality as “a way individuals and society interpret their ultimate reality.” Dr. James Cone, the founder of Black Theology, says “music is also theological. That is, it tells us about the Divine Spirit that moves the

people toward unity and self-determination.” How does Hip-hop create and/or develop a (transformative) spiritual experience? Does Hip-hop in fact have a spiritual historical trajectory that can be measured and documented for the purpose of linking Hip-hop communities together? And if so, what tangible outcomes can come from having a spiritual encounter via Hip-hop culture and music?

CHAPTER 5
EVALUATION PROCESS
“Hip-hop means ‘Show and Prove’”

From its conception to its conclusion, this Demonstration Project will evaluate the existential experience, personal feedback, and the spiritual/consciousness awareness and understanding of the Hip-hop culture as it is seen through the eyes of both the Hip-hop participant and spectator. Every member of the Site Team, with the exception of my editor, Evans Erilus, will be evaluating, giving feedback, and to a small extent, involved in the creation, evaluation and analysis of Hip-hop by providing data that measures people’s understanding of its ability to provide spaces of social transformation and spiritual development. The overarching evaluation process that is going to be used is that of ethnographic research and analysis. Because Hip-hop culture is still fairly young in comparison to other cultural phenomena such as Jazz and Folk music, an ethnographic approach is preferential as it will help us “capture” an oral history of distinct yet overlapping voices that make up the broader Hip-hop community. In this way, we will be able to “capture” the spiritual and transformative elements that connect four generations of Hip-hop movers and shakers. This evaluation process’ overall objective is the following: 1) to create a public awareness campaign that re-educates the general publics—mainly our 18-24 age group—misconception of the *culture* (thanks to Rap) by reintroducing its genesis, 2) exposing its power to empower by using the elements of Hip-hop (eMCeeing, B-boying/B-girling, DJing, Graffiti, and Knowledge) to

gather the community, 3) its ability to allow the individual to have an understanding of “self” (spirituality) by recording their stories in film and through surveys, and finally, 4) assess and measure whether or not Hip-hop is effective in motivating the Hip-hop community, the general public and our 18-24 population specifically, to become agents of social change through community service and most importantly, altering their lyrical content into something more positive.

Method of Evaluation 1 – Ethnographic Research

The implementation of this short public awareness documentary will allow for us the opportunity to bring in the pioneers to speak about their individual experiences and to highlight their collective contributions to the historical trajectory of Hip-hop music and culture. All of the participants (i.e. the interviewees) will be asked questions regarding Hip-hop’s ability to create change and develop spiritual awareness. These same questions will be asked to other individuals, such as the Site Team, the project team, participants and other observers alike, who will not be included in the documentary. However, all data that will be accumulated from the surveys distributed throughout this project will be included into the documentary to highlight important statistics as well as to demonstrate the cohesiveness that is found within the Hip-hop community. I will be conducting the interviews and Site Team member Steve Crawley will be directing the work of our volunteer film team who will be helping us to record and edit our film all throughout this process. The location of the interviews will vary pending on the interviewees schedules and will most likely require us to travel. Fortunately, most of our interviews will be conducted in New York City as this is the birthplace of Hip-hop. This documentary can be used as an educational resource for schools, seminaries, not-for-

profit organizations and faith based communities, as a method to begin a dialogue about why and how Hip-hop culture can and should be used in their respective communities.

Method of Evaluation 2 – Practical Methodology and Participant-Observation Analysis

What does Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment look like? Feel like? This event is intended for the community, my Site Team members, and focus groups to experience “the moment.” More practical methodologies will be integrated here based on the setting of the space (El Fogon), the selection of the artist, props and materials used (including technology), and themes. This participant–observational approach, or action reflection, will be conducted by our team and the focus groups that are between the ages of 18-24. All of us will examine the ambiance of the event held at El Fogon Center of the Arts in early 2013 and assemble a case study based on our observations. This will also be another opportunity to distribute surveys (if people are inclined to do so) and/or mingle with spectators to gain additional insights. As an alternative to the surveys and case studies, additional interviews and footage will be conducted all throughout the event to add to the ethnographic research that will be visually conveyed via the documentary (see Method of Evaluation 1). The purpose of this is to measure the experiences of our 18-24 years of age population (including that of the broader community) as well as to see how effective it is to place them at the center of the spiritual and theological dialogue using Hip-hop as the medium to convey their concerns, hopes and overall message(s).

Method of Evaluation 3 – Survey and Statistical Analysis

Through the guidance and supervision of our Site Team member, Dr. Ernestine Galloway, we will create surveys to include pre and post evaluations, interview questions and short questionnaires that will be distributed all throughout this process, beginning

with our 18-24 year old focus group. Questions that relate to Hip-hop, spirituality, history and demographics will be used to examine the connections that bring Hip-hoppers together for social transformation and spiritual development. The same question(s) will also be asked for those individuals who will be selected for the short public awareness documentary. The pre-evaluation forms for the focus groups will serve as data to see where their Hip-hop competency level is at the moment. Post-evaluations will be used to measure their new-found knowledge of Hip-hop following our discussions, workshops, the event in early 2013 and the showing of the documentary. The questionnaire will be short, informative and used as complimentary data for the documentary. In addition to distributing surveys during the February event (see Method of Evaluation 2), the internet will be used to distribute surveys to colleagues and friends. Social media outlets such as Twitter and Facebook will be used primarily to attract a broader audience. The validity of this information will determine its need as a ministry, after school program or outreach effort, to just name a few. Over 75% of participants will be able to demonstrate a significant interest in re-creating these socio-spiritual spaces for their respective programs, specifically as it relates to our focus group. Alba Mota, one of my Site Team members, will oversee our volunteers in assembling this information. The creation of the survey will begin immediately following approval of this proposal and we will begin distributing them in January of 2013.

CHAPTER 6
MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES
“Knowledge requires Self-Improvement”

The Process

The members of the Site Team helped to place me in the right direction. All of these individuals possess gifts and talents that both add to as well as critique this process based on their respective backgrounds. The following people are supporting me throughout this academic endeavor: 1) Ting Mintz-Olatunji (New York) is my Advisor, in addition to being my Spiritual Counselor, a Hip-hoppreneur, entrepreneur, social entrepreneur, multi-media producer and director, 2) Dr. Ernestine Galloway (New Jersey) has done a lot of anthropological studies, curriculum development and is also a colleague and former co-worker of mine. She has experience in ethnographic research and is a well-respected educator, leader and dynamic progressive Baptist, 3) Steve Crawley (New York) is a film director, editor, entrepreneur and a product of the Hip-hop culture and community. He is also my Hip-hop consultant having numerous connections and outlets that will keep me up-to-date with current Hip-hop trends and music, 4) Alba Mota, M.P.H (New York) is a community organizer, activist and has a lot of experience doing political campaign work in the Bronx. A longtime resident of the Bronx, she is the co-founder of FuntoSalud International, an international not-for-profit organization that does solidarity work in the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. And finally, 5) Evans

Erilus, M.S. (Massachusetts) is a colleague of mine who co-edited my first published book. He has an extensive background in the English language, journalism and writing.

In the month of March of 2012 I assembled this team and informed them of their respective duties, both individually as well as collectively.

In the third week of June of 2012, I circulated the ministerial competencies to my cite team for summation of feedback. All were returned within the week.

Theologian

Walter illuminates and utilizes examples of his knowledge and recall of the Bible and other sacred texts in his interactions with the youth he advises and counsels, including his peers in the Hip-hop community. *Candidate feels the need to focus on a theological foundation that highlights Hip-hop's cultural and historical trajectory.*

Preacher/Interpreter of Sacred Text

Walter has demonstrated his ability to deliver accordingly and appropriately to audiences and groups of diverse backgrounds, varying sizes and orientation. Despite having no real formal training in preaching or in hermeneutics, Walter uses the Hip-hop culture's element of eMCeeing, or rhyming, as a medium to preach and convey the sacred text in a matter that is effective to his target audience—the young people. *Candidate feels the need to learn more effective preaching styles as it relates to youth sermons and text.*

Worship Leader

Walter's potential as a minister of God's work goes beyond worshiping for a

particular congregation, place and space. His talents could be more impactful in a setting where he is free to shift from one place to another planting seeds and leading a legacy of love and spirituality. As such, his desired professional and spiritual goals and objectives do not include his being acknowledged as a Worship Leader.

Candidate wants to see how best to utilize Hip-hop culture as a form of interpretative worship.

Prophetic Agent

Walter's passion to engage in social justice issues is seen through his commitment to building and implementing long-term solutions and coalitions with artist and organizations that are utilizing the Hip-hop culture to create leaders of social change. By empowering the younger generation and involving the community around issues that they feel are important to them is what makes for a transformative experience via music and art. *Candidate feels the need to be more creative and robust in making the connection between spiritual growth and its innate ability to motivate the individual to seek/know "self" and to do justice.*

Leader

Walter's greatest characteristic is that of a leader having already proven to effectively delegate, empower and appreciate a job well done. Walter has the ability to share a space of power in a humble way both as a lay youth minister and a co-organizer for numerous Hip-hop events, panels and presentations. Additionally, he continues to demonstrate his desire and passion for learning by actively seeking information from reading, researching and studying. *Candidate wants to develop his leadership skills further in order to communicate more*

effectively to a diverse audience.

Religious Educator

He commits to teaching religious practices to others who can translate it into their own lives. He's adept at delivering religious concepts and topics both eloquently and wisely. He has demonstrated his potential to be acknowledged as a Hip-hop pioneer and visionary for his desired path of focus. *Candidate wants to continue his religious studies to emphasize more of the spiritual elements that are found in Hip-hop culture.*

Counselor

Walter is a good listener and advisor. His commitment to work with the youth highlights both his innate and learned abilities. His approachable demeanor makes him work well with teachers and students including artist and organizations of the Hip-hop culture. He makes every effort to understand the individual in order for him to give the proper advice. *Candidate would like to receive more formal training as it relates to pastoral counseling.*

Ecumenist

Has actively demonstrated his ability to bring together varying faiths using Hip-hop as a platform for multi-faith expression and reconciliation. He understands the need to create a space for ecumenical dialogue to acknowledge the interconnectedness that is found within varying faiths because of their spiritual relationship. *Candidate is making an aggressive approach to learn more about other faiths specifically non-mainstream denominations/sects and progressive faith-based organizations.*

Witness or Evangelist

He has a desire to expand his Spiritual and Ministerial passion beyond borders where there's a potential for acceptance and development. Walter has the willingness to incorporate tools to effectively communicate spirituality to others. He has actively engaged in evangelical work through his experience in facilitating retreats and mission trips for young people. *Candidate would like to see how he can incorporate more structured evangelical initiatives when doing Hip-hop.*

Administrator

Walter has demonstrated baseline competencies required for him to responsibly administer and manage projects of varying capacity and orientation. He is knowledgeable of other's task and responsibilities. He has the ability to put into perspective the different alternatives and outcomes that are necessary to complete the task at hand. *Candidate feels the need to sharpen his administrative skills in order to effectively manage his time more efficiently.*

Professional

Walter has demonstrated a high level of professionalism that has already garnered him accolades and acknowledgement of his potential to excel as a Hip-hop scholar. He has the ability to work around other people's schedules while developing them professionally. He is adept to placing individuals in positions that allow for their respective gifts to be recognized while achieving an objective goal. *Candidate will focus his attention on developing his ability to manage multiple tasks simultaneously.*

Competencies Chosen for Development

- I) **Faith Rooted Organizer:** Engage in community organizing that focuses on civic engagement and spiritual growth by incorporating the scriptural relevancy that is found in mobilizing Hip-hoppers to do the work of justice.

Strategies:

- A) Participate and observe the works of Honorable George Martinez, who is the first Hip-hop Diplomat to run for a congressional seat in his district of Brooklyn.
- B) Attend one-on-one meetings with Rev. Osagyefo Sekou, a progressive minister who has helped organize numerous faith-rooted movements both nationally and internationally. He is also a Hip-hop advocate and will be interviewed for the short public awareness documentary.

Evaluation:

- A) I will request a written evaluation from Honorable George Martinez to reflect my role throughout his campaign as well as my progression as an effective community organizer.
- B) I will consider the relevancy of my interview with Rev. Osagyefo Sekou as part of my personal faith-rooted organizing skills—both learned and innate.
- II) **Spiritual Leader:** To develop my own spirituality so I can effectively transform global community's into spiritual ones.

Strategies:

- A) Take classes and read further on spirituality.
- B) Go to conferences and lectures on leadership development as it relates to spirituality at the Center of Spiritual Light in the Bronx. This is a nationally

recognized center that was founded by Rev. Dr. Car Jackson, an alumnus of my alma mater Union Theological Seminary.

- C) I will attend youth empowerment and spiritual development programs like the Blue Nile Rights of Passage program at Abyssinian Church and the Miriah Institute Program which takes place at Union Theological Seminary.

Evaluation:

- A) I will receive written feedback from the director of each of these programs to indicate my internalization of spirituality—and programmatic elements that are used to reinforce it—as it relates to Hip-hop music and culture.
 - B) I will write a summary reflecting my experiences and observations of these programs.
- III) **Pastor:** Develop my pastoral skills to create a welcoming presence as a lay leader and as a youth minister who is called to bring “the least of these” to an intimate relationship with the Divine via the Hip-hop culture.

Strategies:

- A) Take courses on Pastoral Counseling at NYTS.
- B) Attend conferences and lectures on pastoring in the 21st Century.
- C) Attend youth services and speak to ordained youth Ministers and Pastors of multiple-faiths to gain insight on their pastoral approach.

Evaluation:

- A) When taking pastoral counseling classes or lectures, I will assure written consent of my completion and/or proof of completion of the course(s).

B) I will gain insight and written feedback from youth participants who participate in Youth churches or faith-based programs.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Timeline

Date	Task/Activity	Tools/Necessary to complete task	Person Responsible	Source of Funding
12/2012	Proposal Approval by Director			n/a
12/2012	Meet with Site Team to review proposal and to discuss the chronology of project.	Teleconference	Me	n/a
12/2012	Meet with Project Team for retreat. Copies of my book will be distributed at this time.	Digital media, copies of my book and Yippie Museum Café. This will take place on a Saturday.	Myself	n/a
12/2012	Meet with Project Team and a few Site Team members to discuss and execute Focus Group event.	Teleconference	Alba Mota, Dr. Ernestine Galloway and I.	n/a
1/2013	Meet w/ Site Team to review plans for January.	Teleconference	Myself	n/a
1/2013	Meet w/ Focus Group (18-24 years of age) to distribute pre-evaluation, give a copy of my book, and to have dialogue.	On a Saturday afternoon at El Fogon. We will need a t.v., food, writing material and microphones.	Me, Project Team members, Hip-hop Pioneers and owner of El Fogon.	Fundraising and donations.

1/2013	Planning and execution of February event with Project Team and a few members of the Focus Group.	Teleconference	Alba Mota and I.	n/a
1/2013	Begin distributing surveys and flyers for February event.	Teleconference to confirm completion of flyer and to map out territory's to cover distribution of flyers. Approval from Site Team member Dr. Galloway of Survey distribution and its content required.	Me	Fundraising of material for flyers and graphic designer.
2/2013	Meet with Site Team to review plans for February.	Teleconference	Myself	n/a
2/2013	Confirm locations and interviewees for public awareness documentary.	Teleconference to primarily speak with film crew. Resource overview to include cameras, digital storage space and editors.	Site Team member Steve Crawley, Project Team member Timothy Jacobs and I.	Fundraising and myself.
2/2013	Final preparation meeting w/ Project Team and Site Team members for Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment	Teleconference	Site Team, Project Team, volunteers, performers and owners of El	n/a

	event.		Fogon.	
2/23/2013	Hip-hop, Spirituality & Empowerment event at El Fogon Center for the Arts.	Film crew, volunteers, Site Team, Project Team, Focus Group, food, artist, digital media, DJ and agenda for the evening.	A few Site Team members and myself.	Fundraising, sponsors, donations and myself.
3/2013	Meet w/ Site Team to review plans for March.	Teleconference	Myself	n/a
3/23/2013	Event overview with Site Team and Project Team members.	Teleconference. Need to edit film to select content to be used for documentary. Compile data from survey distribution.	Myself	n/a
3/23/2013	Book discussion dialogue with Project Team members.	Food and El Fogon.	Myself	Myself
4/2013	Meet w/ Site Team to review plans for April.	Teleconference	Myself	n/a
4/2013	Half way mark. Evaluate data retrieved from documentary and survey distribution.	Teleconference	Project team, Film Team and myself.	n/a
4/2013	Meet with Focus Group to discuss/critique my	Food and El Fogon.	Myself	Myself

	book.			
5/2013	Meet w/ Site Team to review plans for May.	Teleconference	Myself	n/a
5/2013	Meet with Project Team to discuss information compiled from interviews. Filming ends here.	Teleconference	Site Team member, Steve Crawley, Project Team and myself.	n/a
5/2013	Edit, format and construct outline of documentary based on interviews, location footage and information compiled from surveys and participant-observational case studies from volunteers and Project Team Members.	Teleconference	Project Team and Myself	n/a
6/2013	Meet w/ Site Team to review plans for June.	Teleconference	Myself	n/a
6/2013	Evaluation of all surveys. Survey distribution ends here.	Teleconference	Project Team and a few Site Team members and myself.	n/a
7/2013	Meet w/ Site Team to review plans for July.	Teleconference	Site Team and myself.	n/a
7/2013	Documentary is complete.	In-person meeting with Project Team. Television is needed.	Myself.	n/a

7/2013	Public Showing of Documentary.	On a Saturday at El Fagon to include Site Team, Project Team and Focus Group. Post-evaluation of Focus Group and Project Team will be conducted here. T.V. and light refreshments will be served.	Site Team and Myself.	Fundraising and donations.
8/2013	Meet w/ Site Team to review short Documentary showing and to plan for next few months.	Teleconference	Site Team and Myself.	n/a
8/2013 - 12/2013	Library time, writing and research	Assessment of all feedback, surveys and experiences that were accumulated throughout the field project	Me	n/a
1/2014	Review completed Demonstration Project with Site Team	Teleconference	Site Team and myself.	n/a
4/2014	Final Submission of Demonstration Project			

***Estimated Field Project time – 8 months**

****Estimated Dissertation Project Proposal time – 1 year**

Appendix II: Budget

MATERIALS	COST
Focus Group Compensation:	- \$1,400.00
White Paper for Surveys (box of 10 [500 stacks of plain white paper])	- \$50.00
Video Camera(s) (including editing and compensation):	- \$1,000.00
Flyers:	- \$400.00
Food (for event, workshops, documentary showing, retreat, and meetings):	- \$1,000.00
Digital Storage Terabyte for video & picture archives:	- \$100.00
Software Technology Upgrades:	- \$500.00
Music/DJ:	- \$500.00
Artist Stipends (for about 5 performers):	- \$1,000.00
Payment of Film Crew (i.e. sound technician, recording, editing):	- \$1,500.00
Venue Rental(s):	- \$5,000.00
Travel Cost, local and out of state, to interview individuals for documentary (including food):	- \$1,000.00
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Total:	\$13,450.00

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APPENDIX B
PROJECT TEAM

**NEW YORK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (NYTS)
DOCTORAL PROJECT PROPOSAL/RESEARCH**

“HIP-HOP, SPIRITUALITY & EMPOWERMENT”

2-23-2013

Dear participant:

Thank you for being a part of this project and what I believe to be an important and groundbreaking series of events that will change the world. I am honored and humbled to have you join us because you are part of this world and therefore part of this historical meta-narrative.

Hip-hop is real (!) and I believe it can help bring about the beloved community that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. fought so hard to create. I look forward to building with you and I hope that our short time together will have a long lasting impact upon your life.

Peace and blessings,

Walter Hidalgo

Doctoral Candidate at NYTS

NEW YORK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (NYTS)
Doctoral Project Proposal
Hip-Hop, Spirituality and Empowerment
Commitment-Agreement form

I, (PRINT name) _____, as member of the **Project Team** and _____ author of the Project Proposal, under the direct supervision of the NYTS and consulting Site Team members, have discussed the expectation and goals for the **Project Team's** requirements. As such, I am committed to keep the following protocols at all times:

1. Be present, punctual and committed to the following required dates and complete all the listed requisites as part of my responsibilities:
 - a. Discussion group on **Saturday, February 23rd, 2013** from 2pm-4pm
 - b. Read Walter Hidalgo's book *"Beyond the Four Walls: The Rising Ministry and Spirituality of Hip-hop."* Submit a response page by email on March 16th, 2013 to Walter Hidalgo
 - c. Attend and volunteer for the 1st Anniversary of Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment event, on **Sat. March 23rd, 2013** from 4pm-9pm
 - d. Submit my observation/feedback from the March 23rd event to Walter Hidalgo by email by **March 31st, 2013**
 - e. Attend, volunteer and/or possibility be part of the panel for the Documentary showing on Hip-Hop to be held on **June 23rd, 2013**
 - f. Be willing and able to attend and volunteer for any other events as indicated by Walter Hidalgo and/or the Site team as it relates to the Project proposal's successful completion
2. I will listen and follow directions given by Walter Hidalgo, author of the Project Proposal and whoever he assigns to give me directions.
3. I will immediately communicate when I need more directions and/or any circumstances arise preventing me from completing my assigned tasks as a member.
4. I will treat all individuals during all discussions/events with respect and love without exceptions.
5. I will read the entire packet as it is my responsibility to understand the content and carry out any directions given in the packet.
6. I understand that profanity, vulgarity, other inappropriate language AND/OR behavior has no place while participating in this project.

7. I will keep a good attitude even when things are not functioning accordingly.
8. I will abide to the rules listed during any meetings, events, and discussions.
9. **Neither NYTS nor Walter Hidalgo nor the Site Team members nor the volunteers are liable for my wellbeing prior, during or after the Project Proposal completion.**
10. The above mentioned parties are NOT liable for any lost and/or stolen personal items of mine during discussion, event and/or meetings.
11. I understand that I am an important member of the Project Team for the project proposal's goal and evaluation commissioned by Walter Hidalgo and his site team, under the supervision of the NYTS's advisory board, hence abiding to these protocols listed in this form is my duty.

Project Team member signature

Date

Walter Hidalgo's signature

Date

Interview/Video recording Consent Form - SAMPLE

1. I agree to be videotaped and/or interviewed for the purposes of this Project Proposal Research's purpose.
2. The purpose and nature of the interview/recording is part of a documentary to be used for a public awareness campaign on Hip-hop's original intention and its empowerment to the community as well as the project proposal research.
3. I agree that the interview may be electronically recorded.
4. Any questions that I asked about the purpose and nature of the interview, research, and public awareness campaign have been answered to my satisfaction.
5. Choose a) or b)
 - a) I agree that my name and images may be used for the purposes of the research, the documentary, for publications and/or public presentation throughout the states and internationally.

OR

- b) I do not wish my name/images to be used or cited, or my identity otherwise disclosed, in the research and/or documentary.

Name of

interviewee_____

Signature of interviewee_____

Date_____

6. I have explained the project and the implications of being interviewed to the interviewee and I believe that the consent is informed and that he/she understands the implications of participation.

Name of

interviewer_____

Signature of interviewer_____

Date_____

**HIP-HOP, SPIRITUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT
DOCTORAL PROJECT PROPOSAL
WALTER HIDALGO-OLIVARES
SPRING 2013
REQUISITES CHECK LIST TABLE (PT)**

PROJECT TEAM REQUISITES	DATES	ATTENDED	VOLUNTEERED	SUBMITTED	COMPLETED
a) PT Discussion Group	Saturday, February 23rd, 2013 2pm-4pm				
b) Read Walter Hidalgo's book "Beyond the Four Walls: The Rising Ministry and Spirituality of Hip-hop." SUBMIT a response page by email to Walter Hidalgo	Saturday, March 16 th , 2013				
c) Attend-volunteer for the 1st Anniversary of Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment event.	Saturday, March 23rd, 2013 4pm-9pm				
d) Submit my observation/feedback from the March 23rd event to Walter Hidalgo by email.	Sunday, March 31 st , 2013				
e) Attend-volunteer and/or possibility be part of the panel for the Documentary on Hip-Hop's presentation.	Sunday, June 23 rd , 2013 TBA				

Project Team- 1st Interview Form (pre-questionnaire)

- 1) Please, tell us how do you define Spirituality? (in your own words)
- 2) Do you consider yourself to be a Spiritual person? How and why?
- 3) Are you (or have you been) associated with a spiritual community and/or practice? Which one(s)? How often do you participate/attend?
- 4) Are you willing to participate in the promotion of Hip-hop culture – locally and/or globally? Why? In What way?
- 5) Please, tell us how you define Hip-hop? (In your own words)
- 6) Do you consider yourself a Hip-hopper? If yes, why?
- 7) What, if any, lyric(s), art-work(s), dance(s), person(s), song(s) or moment(s) became your introduction to Hip-hop culture?
- 8) Who do you consider to be your top favorite eMCees? Please, tell us of any specific characteristics or qualities you like about them?
- 9) Are you familiar with what has been described and defined as the core “elements” of Hip-hop? If so, please list them. If you have any preferences of the elements, please tell us which ones?

Post-QUESTIONNAIRE for Doctoral Project Participants

- How do you define the term “Hip-hop”?

Explain: _____

- What is meant by spiritual experience?

Explain: _____

- What is the relationship between religion and spirituality?

Explain: _____

- In what way(s) do you think that Hip-hop could provide a spiritual experience in a church’s worship service?

Explain: _____

Give an example: _____

- In what way has your perspective on Hip-hop changed because of your participation in the project?

Explain: _____

- In what way do you think that Hip-hop and spirituality could be a catalyst for individual and/or community empowerment?

Explain: _____

- Would you recommend this project to your community/school/ religious affiliation?

Yes____ No ____

For what purpose?

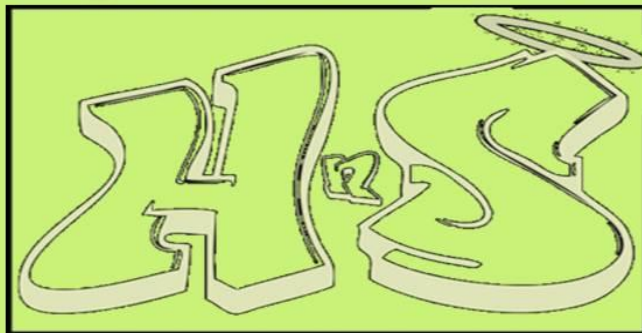
APPENDIX C
FOCUS GROUP

WANT TO BE PART OF THE MOVEMENT?!?!?!?

HIP-HOP is turning 40, and we want to celebrate with
Dialogues, Special events, screenings & **YOUR** participation!



Be ready to experience HIP-HOP like never before!!!



For more info...bordermission@gmail.com

347-908-0506 - twitter: HiphopSpirit-

www.facebook.com/pages/Walter-Hidalgo-Olivares



DON'T MISS OUT!!! GET IN TOUCH WITH US TODAY!

Dear Focus Group Participant:

It is with great joy that I welcome you as an essential member of what we called the **Focus Group (FG)** for my Doctorate Project **Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment**. This project's main purpose is to raise your awareness as a young Bronx resident about the negative aspects of Rap (a byproduct of Hip-hop) versus the social-spiritual and positive impact of Hip-hop's original intentions. As part of the Focus Group, we are requesting you to share your thoughts/knowledge/attitude with us, and the rest of the members, on Hip-hop and society's perception on this culture today.

First, you will receive a brief survey to fill out and return to us within a week by email; it will take less than 10 mins to complete. Second, we have schedule some meetings date for a discussion and two important events, calling for your active participation and feedback in order for the Project to be successful with meaningful information from young people like you.

The first requirement is to attend the group discussion on **Saturday March 9th, 2pm-4pm on Hip-hop and Spirituality**, at el Fogon, Center for the Arts. The second requirement is your participation in the 1st Anniversary celebration of **Hip-hop, Spirituality & Empowerment on Saturday, March 23rd at 4pm**, a main catalyst of the project. During the event, you will be asked to write down your reflections/observations of the evening, please send this by email to the organizers within a week. Another important task as part of the Focus Group's requirements is to read my book ***Beyond the Four Walls: The Rising Ministry and Spirituality of Hip-hop***. Please, submit one page response by email on the reading by **March 16th 2013**.

Lastly, we are asking for your participation at the premiere of the documentary on Hip-hop history thorough the pioneers' lenses on **June 23rd, 2013**. Your participation is key since some of you will be selected to participate as panelists as part of the documentary showing.

All of the gatherings, except for the Documentary showing will happen at **El Fogón, located at 989 Home Street (corner of Vyse) in the Bronx**, trains 2/5 to Freeman Ave. Your full participation and punctuality will be greatly appreciated and cherished.

At the end of your participation in this project, you will be awarded a Diploma of completion and Appreciation. Also, you can use this experience as part of your professional development on your resume and/or as community hours requirements. Please, inform me promptly if you plan to use it as community hours, so I could make the proper arrangements in a timely fashion.

Thank you for your commitment,

Walter Hidalgo

NEW YORK THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY (NYTS)

Doctoral Project Proposal

Hip-Hop, Spirituality and Empowerment

Commitment- Agreement form

I, (PRINT your name) _____ as a member of this project and _____, author of the Project Proposal, under the direct supervision of the NYTS, and consulting Site Team members, have discussed the expectation and goals for the **Focus Group's** requirements. As such, I am committed to keep the following protocols at all times:

1. Be present, punctual and committed to the following required dates and complete all the listed requisites to meet my responsibilities
2. Discussion group on **Saturday, March 9th 2013** from 2pm-4pm
3. Read Walter Hidalgo's book "*Beyond the Four Walls: The Rising Ministry and Spirituality of Hip-hop.*" Submit a response page by email on March 16th, 2013 to Walter Hidalgo.
4. Attend the 1st Anniversary of Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment event, on **Sat. March 23rd, 2013** from 4pm-9pm,
5. Submit my observation/feedback from the March 23rd event to Walter Hidalgo by email by **March 31st, 2013**
6. Attend and/or possibility be part of the panel for the Documentary presentation on Hip-Hop's premiere to be held on **June 23rd, 2013**
7. Be willing and able to attend any other events as indicated by Walter Hidalgo and/or the Site team members as it relates to the Project proposal's successful completion.
8. I will listen and follow directions given by Walter Hidalgo, author of the Project Proposal, and whoever he assigns to give me directions.
9. I will immediately communicate when I need more directions and/or if any circumstances arise preventing me from completing my assigned tasks as a member.
10. I will treat all individuals during all discussions/events with respect and love without exceptions.
11. I will read the entire packet as it is my responsibility to understand the content and carry out any directions given in the packet.

12. I understand that profanity-vulgarity have neither place nor inappropriate language AND/OR behavior during my participation on this project.
13. I will keep a good attitude even when things are not running accordingly and smoothly.
14. I will abide to the rules listed during any meetings, events, discussions.
- 15. Neither NYTS nor Walter Hidalgo nor the Site Team members nor the volunteers are liable for my wellbeing prior, during or after the Project Proposal completion.**
16. The above mentioned parties are NOT liable for any lost and/or stolen personal items of mine during discussion, event and/or meetings.
17. I understand that I am an important member of the **Focus Group** for this Project Proposal's goals and evaluation commissioned by Walter Hidalgo and his site team, under the supervision of the NYTS's advisory board, hence abiding to these protocols listed in this form is my duty.

Focus Group member signature

Date

Walter Hidalgo's signature

Date

**HIP-HOP, SPIRITUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT PROJECT
WALTER HIDALGO-OLIVARES
SPRING 2013**

REQUISITES CHECK LIST TABLE (FG)

FOCUS GROUP REQUISITES	DATES	ATTENDED	VOLUNTEERED	SUBMITTED	COMPLETED
a) FOCUS GROUP Discussion Group	Saturday, March 9 th , 2013 2pm-4pm				
b) Read Walter Hidalgo's book "Beyond the Four Walls: The Rising Ministry and Spirituality of Hip-hop." SUBMIT a response page by email to Walter Hidalgo.	Monday, April 8 th , 2013				
c) Attend the 1st Anniversary of Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment event.	Saturday, March 23rd, 2013 4pm-9pm				
d) Submit my observation/feedback from the March 23rd event to Walter Hidalgo by email.	Sunday, March 31 st , 2013				
e) Attend and/or possibility become part of the panel for the Documentary on Hip-Hop's showing.	Sunday, June 23 rd , 2013 TBA				

FOCUS GROUP – Preliminary Interview (1st form)

Name:

Age:

Gender:

Are you currently enrolled in school? If so, what school/college?

1. Do you listen and/or watch Hip Hop videos?
 - a. Yes/No
 - b. Frequently/sometimes/never
2. How were you introduced to Hip-hop? Please, choose one
 - a. Video
 - b. Song(s)
 - c. Album (Name Album)
 - d. Concert
 - e. House party
 - f. Block Party
 - g. Artist(s) (name artist(s))
 - h. Other(s)_____
3. Do you know or have heard about the core elements of Hip-hop culture?
 - a. Yes/No
 - b. If yes, please list them
4. Can you tell us how old Hip-hop is? In years
5. Can you tell us where was Hip Hop born? Please choose one
 - a. Manhattan
 - b. Brooklyn
 - c. Queens
 - d. Bronx
 - e. Staten Island
6. Are you familiar with the term “Spirituality”?
 - a. Yes/No
 - b. If yes to the above question, please describe what do you consider a spiritual moment and/or practice to be in your life?
7. Are you affiliated with any specific religious/spiritual institution(s)?
 - a. Yes/No
 - b. If yes, please list them

8. Do you have any spiritual/religious practice of your own?
 - a. Yes/No
 - b. If yes, please list them
9. How do you see Hip-hop music related to your spiritual development/experience?

Post-QUESTIONNAIRE for Doctoral Project Participants

- How do you define the term “Hip-hop”?

Explain: _____

- What is meant by spiritual experience?

Explain: _____

- What is the relationship between religion and spirituality?

Explain: _____

- In what way(s) do you think that Hip-hop could provide a spiritual experience in a church’s worship service?

Explain: _____

Give an example: _____

- In what way has your perspective on Hip-hop changed because of your participation in the project?

Explain: _____

- In what way do you think that Hip-hop and spirituality could be a catalyst for individual and/or community empowerment?

Explain: _____

- Would you recommend this project to your community/school/ religious affiliation?

Yes____ No ____

For what purpose?



LIBERATION MIC

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revolutionaries rise

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First come, first serve
All types of art are welcome

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nyc@ANSWERcoalition.org
212-694-8720

APPENDIX D

HIP-HOP, SPIRITUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT – MARCH 23, 2013

HNS presents 1 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

3.23.2013

@ EL FOGON

4PM-9PM

\$5 COVER

2 or 5 to

freeman st.

BEVERAGES FOR PURCHASE

989 Home st

corner (Vyse ave)

Bronx, NY

917-353-6224

FOR MORE INFO

INFO.HIPHOPSPIRIT@GMAIL.COM

PINTER.HIPHOPSPIRIT

CELEBRATING
w/ LIVE ART
PERFORMANCES BY
MC'S
DJ'S BBOYS/BGIRLS

MR. T3 (BK, NY)
CHIEF 69 (BK, NY)
SYNISTA (ATL, GA)
ONE SHOT (NY, NY)
HIRED GUN (BK, NY)
CAMILLE SAFIYA (NJ)
DDS (MILWAUKEE, WI)
VERONICA STAR (NY, NY)
RAMMER MARTINEZ (NY, NY)
DJ AnaMATED
DJ MELLOW G

HIPHOP

40TH

HIPHOP + SPIRITUALITY + EMPOWERMENT

ANNIVERSARY



HIP-HOP, SPIRITUALITY & EMPOWERMENT, SATURDAY, MARCH 23, 2013
EI FOGON, CENTER FOR THE ARTS, Bronx, NY

Event Program (Organizers/Djs)

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 1. Introduction | 5:30pm |
| a. Alba & Walter | |
| 2. 1st Performance- DDS | 5:45pm |
| a. Alba | |
| 3. 2nd Performance- Hired Gun | 5:55pm |
| a. Walter | |
| 4. DJ Mellow Q&A | 6:05pm |
| a. Alba | |
| 5. 3rd Performance- Camille Safiya | 6:10pm |
| a. Walter | |
| 6. Music Break (DJ) | 6:20pm |
| a. DJ Transition during b-dancing Q&A | |
| 7. Bgirls/Bboys Q&A and Performances | 6:40pm |
| a. 1 st - Veronica Star (5mins) | |
| b. 2 nd - Chief69 (5mins) | |
| c. Once Shot comes on stage and all perform (10mins) | |
| 8. 1st Raffle -Music Break | 7:00pm |
| a. (Walter & Alba) | |
| 9. 4th Performance- Sinysta | 7:35pm |
| a. Walter | |
| 10. 2nd Raffle | 7:45pm |
| a. (Walter and Alba) | |
| 11. DJ Anamated Q&A | 7:50pm |
| a. Walter | |
| 12. Music Break | 8:00pm |
| 13. 3rd Raffle | 8:30pm |
| a. Walter & Alba | |
| 14. Announcements and Thank you! Remind questions | 8:35pm |
| a. Walter & Alba | |
| 15. Last Performance by Swang | 8:50pm |

(Yellow highlight: Performers, Aqua Highlight: DJ Q&A/Music break, Red Letters: Raffle time)

Performers were asked to answer performers to answer the below questions in front of the audience prior to performing

(they were also asked to read the Hip-hop Declaration of Spiritual Beliefs prior to the event)

- 1) What lyric, art, person or persons, song or moment (or moments) became your introduction to Hip-hop culture and how has this influenced your life's path?

- 2) Hip-hop is now forty, how do you see your unique perspective on Hip-hop contributing to the legacy of its pioneers, its ongoing evolution and the preservation of Hip-hop's culture?





Hip-Hop: Spirituality and Empowerment Survey

1) Age: _____

2) Gender: _____

3) Zip-code currently living in: _____

4) Ethnicity/Nationality: _____

5) Religious/Spiritual affiliation or practice: _____ Check if none: ____

Questions:

DO YOU THINK HIP-HOP CULTURE IS SPIRITUAL?

Yes ____ No ____

Why?

WERE HIP-HOP'S CORE ELEMENTS SUCCESSFULLY EXHIBITED/EXPRESSED OR
SHOWCASED
AT THIS EVENT?

Yes ____ No ____

If yes, how?

DO YOU THINK HIP-HOP CAN BE USED TO FACILITATE SOCIAL OR SPIRITUAL CHANGE/
TRANSFORMATION?

Yes ____ No ____ Undecided ____

How?

NAME: _____
Please read all the questions before answering

QUESTIONS/March 23 Event Feedback
1. What is your overall impression of this event? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Please be specific• Give examples
2. Give examples of anything that stuck out for you intellectually and spiritually throughout the event?
3. Did the event represent its title (Hip-hop, Spirituality & Empowerment) fully? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Yes/No –• Why?
4. What do you think could be improved for further (similar) events <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In what way• Give concrete examples
5. Any final thoughts/suggestions/comments?

APPENDIX E
DOCUMENTARY

Documentary Showing – Canceled

Scheduled Date – 10/12/13

Location - Riverside Church

Time – 4pm – 7pm

Interviews by Walter Hidalgo, Project Team members, Focus Group Members and performers from related project social events. Additional footage included group dialogues, March 23 event (Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment) and various backdrop scenes of Hip-hop historical sites in New York City and of my hometown of Providence, Rhode Island. Filming and production (editing, rendering, etc.) was by Steve Crawley and Ting Mintz-Olutanji

The purpose and intentions of producing this documentary was manifold. First, we wanted to capture the entire experience of the doctoral project. In other words, this documentary served as a summary toward our collective physical and emotional experiences going through this process. Secondly, our intentions were to capture the social spiritual oral history of Hip-hop by highlighting the purpose, intentions, motivations and spiritual connections associated with each participant by asking questions such as: Why is Hip-hop important to you? How does it influence your life's path and purpose? Is Hip-hop spiritual? These interviews served to connect the multi-generational voices that represent over 40 years of history by hearing from Hip-hop artist – eMCees, dancers, DJ's, parents, Blacks, Latinos, etc.

Thirdly, this documentary was to be shown to the general public on Saturday October 12, 2013 at the Riverside Church to include a panel discussion by the participants, a brief speech from myself and a question and answer segment for the audience and panelists. In addition to that, we were planning to get additional outside feedback from the audience about this experience as additional research feedback by distributing questions asking them about their thoughts, concerns, etc.

Lastly, this documentary was intended to be included with my final proposal submission as an additional tool that can be used for educational purposes. This documentary can be a part of the untold history of Hip-hop culture as it relates to its spiritual and theological relevancy. It can be used to broaden the discussions across generations, cultures, faiths, etc. For all its intents and purposes, this documentary was to be used as a resource for the general public.

Ultimately, the documentary served as a concluding montage of experiences that included interviews by participants, content from the small group dialogues, images from the March 23 event and I narrating the film. This was also meant to serve as a model that can be duplicated by other ministries as a means to encourage them to record their own experiences as well as generate a broader dialogue by posting it online to places such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and other websites.

The more that these short films are posted by churches, ministries or other faith-based groups, the more of a positive outlook Hip-hop Culture would receive, which would gradually even the plain field out and/or possibly eliminate its negative perception altogether. But from a missionary and ministerial perspective, it would help individuals become more aware of how participant's gifts and personal testimonies via Hip-hop mediums are in fact attached to something much greater than themselves and therefore is purposeful and divinely inspired. In other words, their stories will add to the socio-spiritual meta-narrative and trajectory that is found in Hip-hop culture which is altogether unshakable and empowering.

In answering the aforementioned questions we take a totally new approach in dialogue by furthering our outlook on Hip-hop by discussing its theological and spiritual elements thoroughly and openly—which is not spoken about at all in Hip-hop, especially with our focus group populace. As a result, the conversations that came out of the dialogues, the social events and individual interviews were extremely powerful and therefore necessary to document by applying methodological analysis through ethnographic research.

Unfortunately, due to an unexpected and severe illness of my (then) advisor, Ting Mintz-Olutanji, we had to cancel this segment. My advisor and project team member, Steve Crawley, were both steering this piece of the project but due to my advisor having a majority of the resources to produce the documentary mixed with limited time to produce it, it was practically impossible to put together on time to show to the public.

APPENDIX F

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES – FAITH-ROOTED ORGANIZING

The Honorable George Martinez

Founder of the Global Block Foundation

August 2, 2013

I had the honor of observing, collaborating and conducting a series of interviews with the Honorable George Martinez. A native New Yorker, Honorable George is an activist, educator, eMCee, father, husband, entrepreneur, cultural ambassador and producer. He is the first Hip-hop artist elected to a political office in New York (Democratic District Leader and State Committeeman, 51st Assembly District). He is the Founding Chairman of the Hip-hop Association (H2A), Co-Founder of the Blackout Arts Collective, and Founder/Executive Director of the Global Block Foundation.

Honorable George is an excellent example of a Hip-hop faith-rooted organizer. He makes it very clear that although he is a politician, he is first and foremost a God fearing man who is fueled by the spirit. He says “real political change happens at the local level” and it’s fueled by a Higher Infinite Power that is Healing Our People – Hip-hop! I spent time with Honorable George by hearing him speak in various occasions, participating in Hip-hop fundraising events for his many organizations, and witnessed his social justice pursuits. His Hurricane Sandy relief efforts were especially impactful, as it included a huge Hip-hop concert in Far Rockaway.

Faith and justice is at the core of Honorable George Martinez’s vocation and he does not see them as being mutually exclusive but inclusive. He says he uses politics to work closely with various leaders, including religious, to tackle on the tough injustices plaguing the city of New York – incarceration, housing, police misconduct and

education, to just name a few. He uses his relationship between the Hip-hop community and politicians to engage our younger generation with social justice, while recognizing the spiritual force that is guiding all of our work together.

Honorable George Martinez is a Hip-hop pioneer that I have referenced many times throughout my doctoral project to our participants because he is a person who can help Hip-hop to bridge the inter-generational gap. He may be over 10 years older than I am, but his spirit is as youthful as mine and he shows it whenever he performs and speaks to young people from all over the world. Honorable George Martinez reminds us that social justice is a political endeavor with spiritual connotations to it because anything going against God is socially detrimental. I look forward in working alongside this brother in the future, as he is an excellent resource and example of faith-rooted organizing, spirituality and empowerment!

Interfaith Leadership on America's Sacred Ground

Union Theological Seminary

February 6, 2013

This conference entitled *Interfaith Leadership on America's Sacred Ground: Abraham Joshua Heschel and a 21st Century Interfaith Vision* served to enhance my faith-rooted organizing skills by hearing Interfaith Leader Dr. Eboo Patel speak at Union Theological Seminary. Dr. Eboo Patel is the Founder and President of the Interfaith Youth Core, which supports the vision of Rabbi Joshua Heschel's interfaith endeavors made noticeable during his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. The Youth Core therefore represents a multi-faith movement of young people who fight for common injustices alongside varying faith communities.

The primary discussion that came out of this conference was the need for inclusive language and history, where Dr. Eboo Patel notes is the result of "the Source creating creation diverse." This includes applying faith language amidst non-believers in order to create a more just and equal society despite our spiritual and humanistic distinctions. This begins first by amplifying the good in all faiths instead of the media's negative portrayal of it. For example, the Priest child molestation cases should not generalize Catholics considering their overwhelming history of charitable works and longstanding contributions to educational endeavors, especially when considering private schools and universities. The same can be said about the fabrication of conflicts between different faiths such as Muslims and Christians. Dr. Eboo Patel notes that in countries

like Nigeria, for example, where such a conflict exists there are also organizations where Muslims and Christians are working together reconstruct war torn areas of the country.

This is why I never exclude mentioning to my audience my commitment to multi-faith work by first acknowledging Christianity as my religious faith. But in the case of Hip-hop, where the art is respected regardless of one's religious background, it serves as the medium upon which my faith-rooted organizing as a Christian is projected out to my peers. This is very challenging when, for example, one of our participants denounced the relationship between Hip-hop and faith—particularly Christianity—due to its negative historical connotations of genocide, slavery and manipulation. As a Christian I had to respect this persons' opinion but I also had to make sure to inform her that Christianity was never the problem, Christians are.

This brings us back to the idea of taking out the negative perceptions of religion by recreating newer ones (or revisiting old ones) through Hip-hop culture. I see Hip-hop doing this in so many ways whenever I see various faiths working collaboratively to create amazing spiritual murals, songs and social events. Hip-hop therefore helps to create a theological remix, or synthesis, that parallels the multi-faith thinking of theologians such as Paul Knitter, who commented in the conference by stating that “I would have never been a Christian had I known the Buddah.”

Rev. Osagyefu Sekou

Senior Minister of the First Baptist Church in Jamaica in the State of Massachusetts

Associate Fellow for Religion and Justice at the Institute for Policy Studies

10/12/13

Brother Sekou is a dear friend of mine who I've known since my days at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. To have him be a part of my doctoral work years later is both a pleasure and an honor. Rev. Sekou exemplifies excellent leadership qualities as the quintessential faith-rooted organizer and minister. While his own skepticism of Hip-hop as a movement lingers, his faith in me and in this project provides him much hope. Rev. Sekou is the author of several books including his most recent work, *God, Gays and Guns: Religion and the Future of Democracy*.

Still, it is his first written book is the most relevant to this project due its reference of Hip-hop culture. Entitled *Urban Souls*, Reverend Sekou sees Hip-hop culture as providing a prophetic voice for youth in the urban context. He sees Hip-hop as providing a soul for our marginalized youth by inspiring them to become agents of social change through social activism.

Rev. Sekou understood this very well by utilizing his ministerial gifts to empower and do the work of social justice. He has been at the forefront of the Living Wage Campaign Movement in New York City, which fought to provide low wage families opportunities for a livable wage. This was made possible through the collaborative efforts of various clergy from different faiths. He also comes from the tradition of the Civil Rights movement, having been born in a small rural area in Arkansas.

His work with various church leaders, student activist and community organizers provides me and this project with various resources and deep wisdom. I have watched him in action through various speeches and marches, including the rights for immigrants march in Washington D.C. where he was arrested alongside nationally known activist and intellectual Dr. Cornel West. Having read all of his books only to later include him in the epilogue segment of my book, *Beyond The Four Walls: The Rising Ministry and Spirituality of Hip-hop*, Reverend Sekou is someone who represents an excellent bridge connector between our elders of the Civil Rights Movement and the youth of this generation.

Reverend Sekou is a practicing Christian faith who uses his clerical role to convey a hermeneutic that is grounded in an empire critical theology mixed with a social justice Christology—a perfect mix of spirituality and empowerment. I was happy to have Rev. Sekou as a guest speaker to my project where he provided us with excellent feedback and knowledge. I look forward to continuing my relationship with this amazing spiritual leader and faith-rooted organizer.

Cell Blocks and Border Stops Conference

Union Theological Seminary Institute for Pragmatic Practice

October 17-19, 2013

Ministerial Competency – Faith Rooted Organizing

This three-day conference was put together by Union Theological Seminarian students and various grassroots organizations from all over the country. Countless faith leaders, activists, scholars and members of the broader community were in attendance as we dialogued amongst ourselves regarding the harshest realities that are currently plaguing our time – mass incarceration, immigration, the military industrial complex and the war on drugs.

How are people of various faiths able to come together to respond to these conditions, despite our theological, cultural and historical differences? That same question needs to be asked of the Hip-hop community because it too represents such a diversity of backgrounds and understandings. The answer to this question is simple: find the common things that are affecting us all. In this particular conference, the aforementioned topics were what needed to be discussed.

Out of the many panel sessions they had I, felt compelled to sit in on the “Arts, Culture and Resistance” discussion to see if I could find my answers there. One of the panelists I believe summarized it best when he said, “ art promoted Socratic thinking because it creates an intersection of ideas from all over the world” – that’s Hip-hop! This conference spent most of the time informing its attendees above all else. Of course

we know conferences can serve that purpose alone – to educate. However, how can we apply this new found information into the real world, together? And, how can we find the common language to create the necessary steps to make our faiths speak to this work? Those were some of the final questions that were posed to us at the end of the conference after we all broke up into separate groups following our breakout sessions.

Hip-hop can definitely serve as this medium for education and faith rooted organizing by using its aesthetics as testimonies for critical thinking, education and resistance—emblems of faith rooted organizing. Instead of thinking about rap culture as being representative of the entire Hip-hop culture, why not use it as a platform for dialogue, reflection and action? The dignity and life of humanity, to do the work of justice, to love one another and to empower the oppressed are duties that run parallel with the beliefs of all faiths. Ultimately, faith serves as both a moral compass and a road map for doing justice—and organizing.

To organize the community one must first be educated by having conferences such as these to promote reflection and dialogue between faiths. Hip-hop can serve as this tool, considering all the people and resources at its disposal. This is why having the initial small group dialogues with the focus group and project team was so crucial. To hear from each member and to connect with each other is crucial, especially when discussing things that are affecting the Hip-hop community such as stop and frisk and poor education.

This conference for me represented what should be happening all over the country, especially in our communities of faith. This is what it means to organize the

faithful—it begins by asking the right questions with a call to action. An action all too familiar with the motivations of the prophets of the 1st testimony, only this time, it's our time!

APPENDIX G

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES – SPIRITUAL LEADER



March 22, 2013

New York Theological Seminary
511 West 164 Street
New York, NY 10032

Dear Friends,

On Saturday, March 16, Walter Hidalgo, a doctoral candidate of your school, attended a conference I conducted at Riverside Church, New York, NY, entitled, *"10 Spiritual Practices of Progressive Christianity."*

The description of the event was as follows: *"Progressive Christians are inspired by a 'progressive Jesus' who teaches God's limitless grace and love for everyone. Therefore, progressive Christians seek to build a church that is 'an inclusive community' that rejects no one and upholds the infinite value of each soul, 'a community of equals' where diversity is affirmed, but has no hierarchy of persons or gifts, 'a community of ministers' in which everyone is seen as a minister with unique God-given purposes, 'a community of encouragement' in which all are advocates of each other's spiritual lives and gifts.*

"What kind of inner spiritual growth is required to live out this vision? Explore the spiritual practices of spaciousness, deep listening and empathy, eyes that see transcendent treasure in the Ordinary, everyone is our spiritual teacher, finding our 'spiritual cutting edge,' being 'prophets of vulnerability,' facing our shadow, being advocates of others' gifts, seeking unity and reconciliation, and consensus decision-making. Examine how these inner foundations impact approaches to leadership, worship, and church growth."

This retreat helped participants understand the spiritual maturity and inner foundations that are required of any church community that is serious about going the distance in being an inclusive, "foot-washing community" of equals that affirms human diversity and lives by mutual empowerment principles. How can people who are very different in their

political, cultural, theological perspectives learn from each other, respect each other, love each other, hear God's voice in each other? How do they go to those deeper levels of spiritual awakening in which they live with the "mind of Christ" as Paul put it, and they are molded by their deep sense of connection with all people and all living things?

How can whole church communities, who are locked into conventional, hierarchical ways of thinking and living, grow into a "community of equals" that expresses the "mind of Christ" or the "kingdom of God" as Jesus taught? What kind of facilitation skills, spiritual practices, and leadership priorities do pastors and lay leaders need to have to order to effect such spiritual transformation in the small groups, committee meetings, mission initiatives, and worship experiences of the conventional church?

The Progressive Christian movement has its finger on some very profound understandings of God's limitless grace, universal salvation, inclusive community, everyone a minister with unique gifts. These gospel priorities could transform the future shape of Christianity in the global village. But the inner building blocks of such transformation found in Jesus' gospel (listed above) must be appropriated and intentionally cultivated.

Walter was exposed to the leadership skills required of one seeking to create such community - how to practice spaciousness, listen deeply and lovingly, create "safe space," draw others out, help people "find their voice," encourage everyone's participation, see transcendent treasure in ordinary people, be a "prophet of vulnerability" who shares one's soul with others, enter one's "spiritual frontier" and help others do the same, tap into the "group wisdom," activate group discernment, face one's shadow, work toward reconciliation, guide groups in consensus decision-making, setting compassionate boundaries for damage control, creating group processes which rely not on "the expert" for spiritual inspiration, but rather on ordinary people inspiring each other through "mutual empowerment" sharing.

Walter actively engaged in all the group discussions, in large groups and small, lending good insights from his work with youth and multi-cultural settings. Walter and I also had private conversations on breaks about the search for universal languages (such as music and poetry) that can authentically and effectively speak in new ways of the deep truths of Jesus' gospel and vision.

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to write me (revsfarr@gmail.com) or call (315-583-5821). Blessings on all the good work you do at New York Theological!

In Christ, Rev. Ron Farr

The Kabbalah Centre New York – 155 East 48 Street, New York, NY
June 2013 – September 2013
Reflection
10/15/13

I registered for a summer intensive program at the Kabbalah Centre New York to enhance my Spiritual Leadership. Kabbalah is a spiritual practice that teaches us to desire understanding by awakening ourselves to the Light that surrounds our souls. This light stands ready to purify one's vessels of reception. At this time the Lights will clothe the able vessel. When one engages in this wisdom, mentioning the names of the Light and the vessels related to one's soul, they immediately shine upon us to a certain measure. However, they shine for him/her without clothing the interior of his/her soul for lack of the able vessels to receive them.

Despite that, the illumination a person receives time after time during the engagement draws upon their grace from above, imparting that individual with abundance of sanctity and purity, which bring one much closer to reaching perfection. Kabbalah was one of the most inspiring and transformative spiritual trainings and disciplines that I have ever received. It has taught me to look at myself and others in a whole new different light. It teaches us to develop a relationship with the Creator by restricting our ego and by developing a greater capacity to share with others. This kind of spirituality stands at the core of my project. It is in the sharing of Hip-hops aesthetics that we give of ourselves to others and in turn re-define our esoteric roles as co-creators of the Divine.

Kabbalah's main focus therefore is to awaken the soul. It is for this specific reason that I wanted to experience the religion, as to awaken the souls of Hip-hoppers. Kabbalah became an excellent source of enhancing one's own spiritual thinking and

application through its teachings of unity and inclusivity—that's Hip-hop! And despite its age (thousands of years old) and its dense theological training, it remains a valuable tool for spiritual growth and development today. Much in the same way when our participants shared their understanding of spirituality by utilizing the aesthetics of Hip-hop culture for understanding the world they live in and how the Divine relates to that reality.

Because one of the outcomes of this project is to encourage our participants to be responsible citizens, Kabbalah reminds us that we are responsible for all of our actions—much like our participants our responsible for their creations and lyrics.

Finally, Kabbalah invited everyone to be a part of the conversation which allowed for more robust conversations, especially when we broke up into small groups. Again, this was another great way to view the future of spiritual development and sacred spaces because these gatherings resembled the original churches of antiquity given their size and nature. Much like the Moriah Institute, Kabbalah presented itself as a platform for equal opportunities for opinions, expressions and testimonies. I hope one day a space like Kabbalah will be available for the Hip-hop community for I see the same pedagogical and spiritual anecdotes applicable to future projects related to the Hip-hop culture.

Reflection of Imam Alfred Mohammed
9-25-2013

I met Brother Imam Alfred Mohammed at a Peace Conference that was held at New York Theological Seminary in May 2013. He was very impressed by my speech, where we concluded the conference by referencing the Hip-hop Declaration of Peace as a valuable tool for international peace and reconciliation. A few months later, I was invited to speak at his online radio program which focuses on re-thinking religion.

One of Brother Imam Alfred's biggest frustrations is the lack of religious participation in ending youth violence. So as a practicing Muslim and leader in his community in New Jersey, Brother Imam Alfred Mohammed understood not only the validity in ecumenical collaboration for peaceful purposes, but he understood the role of youth in this endeavor via the Hip-hop culture. In other words, he approaches his work from a social justice perspective by making it clear that in order to change this world, the youth have to be at the head of the pursuit for transformation. If Hip-hop is that he states, "then so be it!"

Part of the discussion in his radio program included the spiritual relevancy of Hip-hop with the religion of Islam. I made it very clear that the first affiliation that Hip-hop culture had with any major religion was Islam. Many of our most notable and respected artists come from this religious background including members of the Wu-Tang Clan, Grand Nubian and Mos Def. With references such as "peace god" and "da cypha," the Nation of Islam has played a strong influence with Clarence X13, a Vietnam War veteran from Harlem, came to teach the Hip-hop community about the 5% Nation, or Fiver Percent lessons. This offshoot of Islamic studies injected its philosophies—but with a twist—by focusing its attention on the fact that they are, "gods."

Still, in this context, the group references gods in a sense that if they tap into their godly attributes they will excel beyond their counterparts in any endeavor they put their mind into, like Hip-hop. This was the beginning of a Hip-hop resurgence that positioned Hip-hop in a quest for spirituality by embedding the ideals, disciplines and theology of a faith whose sole purpose was to empower them. This history of Hip-hop adds to the spiritual conversations that took place in my project, which later led to the introduction of the Hip-hop Declaration of Spiritual Beliefs.

Brother Imam Alfred Mohammed was a great resource for further observation of multi-faith initiatives and spiritual conversations. It is for this reason that I wanted to interview and observe him for the purposes of developing my own spiritual leadership. If I am to use that word spirituality for my project, I would need to collaborate with other faith leaders to further expand upon the theological and spiritual discourses of all understandings and perspectives—this helps in the creation of social transformation. Brother Imam Alfred Mohammed has taught me that across major religions there are leaders who see Hip-hop as that unifying force for social change and spiritual empowerment for many years to come.

Interview with a mentor for the Moriah Institute program
October 1, 2013
New York, New York
Subject's name will remain anonymous

When speaking to this Subject she informed me of her joy in working with Dr. Mariah Britton, the founder of the Moriah Institute. This program advocates for youth by encouraging them to be social agents of change and by first transforming themselves. The Subject's role, therefore, was critical in the development of the youths Rites of Passage. This process is very important in a young persons' life because as the Subject states, "it brings purpose into their lives."

That is the ultimate goal of this project—to find balance in our young peoples' lives by accepting the calling earthly duty, while anticipating the next life with the Divine. This program teaches them the validity in servitude, spirituality, community and so much more. This kind of exposure helps our youth foster a family of developing leaders who become long-lasting friends with each other forever.

I felt this program was an excellent source for spiritual leadership development because Dr. Mariah Britton's program epitomizes the recreation of sacred spaces and spirituality. Furthermore, she understands that transformation in the 21st Century group consists of dialogues, social gatherings, mentorship and social media. They are mediums she utilizes to spiritually charge our young people by allowing them to make the choice to accept the path of purpose. If they choose not to do so, it is up to them and they are allowed to re-discern.

Ergo, it is important that the spiritual leader stay relevant in order to keep up with the changes of the world which our youth are heavily engaged in. Much like the spirit which is constantly moving and reshaping itself to inspire the world, we are called to do

the same. That is to say the spirit is restless as reflective in leadership of the person whom the spirit is working on. This subject whom I interviewed was herself inspired by the work of Dr. Mariah Britton. That kind of effect represents true spiritual leadership, because every spiritual leader should touch all those who have been blessed to be around him or her. This shouldn't be interpreted as being egotistical but instead serve as a reminder that we are all called to bring a little heaven here on earth.

This interview, along with my observations of the Moriah Institute program (which happens every Saturday beginning in November and ending in April), has helped me to see the countless possibilities that Hip-hop culture can have when used for these spiritual purposes. These gatherings of youth and mentors create a safe space that allows for all youth—no matter their background, or for that matter, religious affiliation—to feel equally involved in exploring issues such as sexuality and purpose. Much like my doctoral project, this program represented an alternative sacred space for spiritual growth as described by Dr. Heltzel—a “transformational space.”

But unlike the Moriah Institute, where the young people are guided into their discernment process, my project focused primarily on the spirituality of Hip-hop where Hip-hop is already implied as being the vocation. This happens through Hip-hop dialogues and through the use of its aesthetics in social gatherings. These are transformational spaces because it places our young people in positions of servitude and spiritual leadership.

Day of St. Ignatian Reflection
Church of St. Rose of Lima
10/12/13

I attended a one-day retreat with about thirty adults to learn about the spiritual teachings and reflections of St. Ignatius of Loyola. This retreat was sponsored by the Jesuit Collaborative, which looks to enhance the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius. I wanted to participate in this retreat to help develop my own spiritual leadership skills as part of my ministerial competencies. I needed to experience these practical lessons from one of the most revered social justice and spiritual leaders of the Catholic Church. St. Ignatius experienced a transformative experience after suffering an injury in battle only to inspire a group of men to start the Jesuit Order. The current pope, Pope Francis, is a Jesuit so he comes from this tradition of social justice and a preferential care for the poor. This outlook on life comes from St. Ignatius popular saying that “God is found in all things.” This to me is an excellent example of inclusive language which is why I used this quote—among others—to be displayed for our March 23 event. St. Ignatius teaches a discipline of spirituality that includes silent meditation, reflection and in recognizing the Divinity in everything under the sun.

I integrate this kind of theology into the spiritual conversations that I had with our project participants. When they begin to see the Divine in all things they will also see it in Hip-hop culture and hopefully utilize it as a medium to go deeper into reflection mode. According to St. Ignatius, spirituality consists of frequent reflection of one’s own life and purpose hence the significance of prayer and reflection throughout this retreat. When practiced thoroughly your spirituality becomes active in your life because you apply this awareness as away to live in relationship with God.

Therefore reflections over sacrifice, liberty, service to the poor are crucial in the development of one's own vocation, not career. When our desires are aligned with that of God we become a light and bridge to those who are seeking God. This stands at the core of this project in that each participant was encouraged to reflect on their own light via there Hip-hop gifts and how important it is when conveying it to their own respective communities.

This retreat had a lot of similarities with my Kabbalah teachings. It further suggests that the spirit can go by many names but serves the same purpose—Hip-hop, therefore, should not be excluded from that purpose. Therefore, integrating reflection before (and after) a performance, during our dialogues and following this project allows for our participants to gain further insight about themselves, their community and the Divine. I look forward to attending a future St. Ignatius retreat to further my spiritual leadership.

APPENDIX H

MINISTERIAL COMPETENCIES – PASTOR

As part of my ministerial competencies, specifically as it pertained to the Pastoral aspect, I attended a small interfaith dialogue with faith leaders Dr. Azizah Yi Al-hibr, a Muslim scholar; Rev. Julie Johnson Staples of the Riverside Church; and Rabbi David Saperstein of Jewish Theological Seminary. Because my role as pastor/lay leader is to engage spiritually with a diverse Hip-hop community, I needed to hear from experts who had experiences in multiple faith work and ministries.

The primary question was: How deep are the multi-faith movements and how long will they last? An interesting question considering our Muslim panelist response by saying that “many Muslims who are currently living in the United States are coming from homogenous countries where Islam dominates both the theological and political landscape.” In my own mind I thought that the Hip-hop culture is certainly a multi-faith movement that needs to be recognized, considering its international presence. Not too many people are aware of groups like Revolt whose members are both Jewish and Muslim and reside in the country of Israel (which continues to undergo a conflict between Israelis and Palestinians).

Unfortunately, the faith communities of these major religions have yet to reconcile their differences, other than to ask “what would Moses, Jesus and Mohammed say?” The conversations that came up subsequently highlighted our need to get back to our history as a lesson for our future. Now with more information and resources accessible to us all, common injustices like air pollution and war have become mediums upon which multiple faiths can come together to fight for. The Millennial generation was

brought up, which is a common theme throughout my research findings. The conference touched on this population as creating a gap with generations considering the advancements in technology. However, the spirituality of these faiths is what drives youth and young adults to fight for justice which is a common theme in all religions.

While this conference may have provided great academic preparation for pasturing in the 21st Century, it did not provide any practical methods for this generation other than to do our homework. Nevertheless, it was helpful in hearing from experts of varying faiths who are also wrestling with these same spiritual concerns that my project participants underwent throughout our dialogues together.

A Response to Walter Hidalgo's

Hip Hop and Spirituality

Presented August 11, 2013 at the

Space for Grace Mid-Week Worship Service of

The Riverside Church in the City of New York

I was thoroughly impressed by Walter Hidalgo's preparation and presentation of this sermon, based on Matthew 19:13-15 where Jesus rebukes his disciples for preventing the children from coming to him saying, "It is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs." (19:14)

This was Walter's first sermon at Riverside, and I witnessed a man who often shied away from preaching finally own the space where his vocation as a Hip Hop artist and advocate assumed the full magnitude of its sacred voice. His message was clear and on point with the Gospel text that inspired it. He urged a congregation progressive in many ways, yet lacking in its attention to children and youth, to see the prophetic handwriting (or graffiti) on the wall declaring that the realm of God is among us and within our midst, embodied in divinely motivated youthful perspectives anxious to be heard and offered an honored place at the spiritual banquet table.

He began by speaking in tongues of his craft, which came across at first impression like a noisy gong and clashing cymbal. But as he kept talking and we kept listening, the gong and cymbal assumed a rhythmic cadence that moved us to new levels of discernment. God it seemed as writing on the parchment of his soul, and Walter was simply sharing the manuscript; or in his own words, "God is the author of my life. I'm just reading it."

Toward the end of his sermon he seemed to grow tired, probably from the nervous and spirited energy he was expending; but his pace never faltered to the point where he lost our interest.

Through compelling stories of his experience teaching and learning from youth, Walter held us in the palm of God's hands and reminded us of our God-given commission to provide a sacred space where the child may be holy and wholly empowered to speak to and liberate the child within us all. For it is to such that the kingdom of heaven belongs.

The Reverend Dr. Arnold Isidore Thomas

Senior Minister

Wilton Congregational Church

Wilton, Connecticut

Former Minister of Education, Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations

The Riverside Church in the City of New York

THE YOUTH MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH OF THE LORD (ALADURA)

September 1, 2013

**Bro. Kehinde Adebayo
YMCL President YMCL Nat. PRO**

Dear Sir or Madam,

We bring greetings of peace and love from our Lord Jesus Christ. May God's grace be multiplied to you in Jesus mighty name. Amen. The National Executives of the above Youth Ministry was pleased to invite Minister Walter Hidalgo to the **2013 National Halleluyah Nite Ministration Concert** as **Special Guest of Honour** and one of our **Guest Minister** for the day.

Halleluyah Night is a program held at the eve of our Church Annual Mount Tabieorar program. Mount Tabieorar is a place of prayer, victory and testimonies where many lives have been blessed. Tabieorar holds from 10th to 22nd August of every year. Within this period, people seek God's face in prayer and fasting while on August 22nd (the climax), the door of the mount is opened for people to ascend it and encounter the God of all possibilities. We believe that effective prayer is incomplete without praise and thanksgiving, the Youth Ministry has therefore put together Halleluyah Night to enable everyone to praise their way into the final day of Tabieorar.

Halleluyah Night is usually a night of high praise, worship and thanksgiving in honor of the Lord who answers prayers and as we do every year, we invite renowned gospel ministers to join in with anointed music minstrels of our Church to glorify God and bless peoples' lives. Minister Walter Hidalgo ministered superbly to our youth integrating imagery, a sermon and a Hip-hop performance.

His message was clear – God is Hip-hop! And the over 10,000 youth who were present responded with a resounding – yes! We hope Minister Walter will return to bless us with his presence. He certainly knew how to preach the word by giving testimony to the power of Hip-hop and how he is an example of it.

Date: August 21, 2013

Time: 8pm

Venue: Victory Nite Ground, Lagos-Ibadan Expressway, beside Tabieorar Ground, near TCC training centre former Ogere toll plaza, Ogun State

Thank you and Shalom!

Yours in His Service,
**For: YMCL Nigeria Province
Bro. Olakunle Owolana**

Secretariat: 6-8, Adejobi Crescent
Anthony Village Lagos.
P.O. Box 1657,
Ikeja - Lagos
Tel: 037 – 620052, 620044, 07067326557
C/o Youth Desk, Primate Office
International Headquarters, Ogere-Remo

2013 Bible Conference at New York Theological Seminary
“To the Ends of the Earth”
10/21/13

I was honored to be a panelist for this conference entitled *To the Ends of the Earth: Models of Mission in the 21st Century*. My topic was entitled *Hip-hop, Spirituality and Empowerment* which was my dissertation in a nutshell. In this conference panelist presented methods of evangelizing in the 21st Century in order to start a broader dialogue of the role of the church in our current social context. One of those discussions came from the vantage point of an ordained minister. His discussion focused upon the role of the Millennial population, who make up a chunk of the population that are redefining church and ministry.

The significance of this conference was to help raise my awareness as a lay minister to help me develop my ministerial competencies as a Pastor. How do we pastor in to this generation where technology continues to expand and church continues to be challenged? Much of my work focused on the dominant discussions that came out of this conference which was the growing alteration and decreasing of attendance in mainline Churches from all over the world.

From Hip-hop pedagogy and spirituality to the Millennials and technology; all topics served as a reminder of our need to revamp how we minister to non-believers today. In the Hip-hop community, this is also troubling because many of them come from these religious traditions; not surprisingly, many of them are no longer affiliated with any faith community—this is according to my research findings. Not only did this conference afford me a platform to discuss our need to integrate Hip-hop culture as 21st

Century medium for faith development, but it also served as additional insight to my research regarding the spiritual crises that is plaguing our world.

Interestingly enough, I was the only non-ordained person in the panel yet I was given just as much feedback from my speech/sermon as my ordained peers. This is extremely important when you consider my role as a pastor in the 21st Century especially when working closely with young people. The Millennials—which I include myself to be —represent a rising group of social-justice minded young adults who are choosing spirituality over religion, commitment over casual participation and vitality over the status quo.

With two presenters touching on Hip-hop culture and an overwhelming concern of elders who were present concerned over the state of the church; church needs to learn from the pioneers of this generation, whose doubts and questions might not only reshape the church, but save it. It is irrelevant if I remain as a lay leader or advance my vocation as an ordained minister; the tools and skills required to pastor to our young people today are as important and therefore must be unique, technological, cooperative and justice related.

Reverend Doctor Peggy Anderson
Zion Church of the Truth
10/27/13

On Saturday, October 27, 2013, Walter Hidalgo was invited to speak at my church, the Zion Church of the Truth, in Brooklyn, NY. Walter presented on the spirituality of Hip Hop. It was clear that Walter is well informed about this topic. His passion on the topic was apparent as he delivered his speech with a rhythmic flow. He pointed out that Hip Hop was more than just beats, rhymes, dance, and fashion because there is a spiritual component that comes to play when one declare “I Am Hip Hop.”

What was lacking in the presentation was clarity and connection with the audience. I believe that part of a pastoral competency is to speak with clarity and to connect with your congregation. Although, Walter is not a pastor nor desire to be one, he can utilize these two skills when addressing a Christian congregation. He spoke more with a Hip Hop dialect or flow which was not common amongst this particular congregation, which made it difficult for them to connect with the speaker. However, as I stated previously, he does possess two key pastoral characteristic, dedication and a solid belief in the spirituality of Hip Hop.

MPC 1004 Introduction to Pastoral Care and Counseling
New York Theological Seminary
Fall 2013
Rev. Insook Lee, Th.D

I absolutely enjoyed this class. We covered everything from the Genogram to grief and loss to pastoral anecdotes to psychological analysis and application. This class taught me so much about myself as it does for those I serve. As it relates to Hip-hop culture specifically, one thing that stood out the most for me that was what was said by our professor: “people with traumas connect with others.”

A lot of the people I spoke with, including members of the project team and focus group, expressed a need to say something related to the injustices that were occurring in there respected neighborhoods. They also expressed to me their personal challenges, which ultimately required me to conduct one-on-one meetings with project participants in order to attain participation feedback. All of these conversations converted into some form of counseling, considering the content that was pulled out of the discussions. In one way or another something needed to be filled whether it is personal or communal. Questions about responsibility, accountability, tranquility, equality and many other “-ility’s” dominated the discussion as we wrestled with our own interpretation of the Divine and the role that Hip-hop culture has in that journey – if any.

Because many of the participants were involved in Hip-hop culture in one way or another, their respective arts and active roles in the community gave them a good foundation of the public discourses that Hip-hop was having regarding education, community-police relations, social policies and spirituality. However, many of them never associated the work that they were doing as being a part of the legacies of spiritual

leaders like Jesus, Ghandi or Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This kind of interpretation and contribution to Hip-hop culture created dialogue that resembled many of our pastoral counseling classes because it brought together people with common social ills that were connected with relational problems.

Hip-hop culture encourages expression through the aesthetics and its stage is the battle field. It is for this reason that I wanted to develop my skills as a pastoral counselor. Developing my pastoral skills as a spiritual leader required that I sought out this correlation between psycho-therapy and spirituality. This interdisciplinary approach has made me think about the influence that Hip-hop Culture has in developing familial-communal systems that are aligned with the family systems theory of homeostasis. Homeostasis is an emotional system and transference that exist as a function in family dynamics. This interdependency of emotions fosters community, and is reflective in the Hip-hop community because it expands the family structure definition to include Hip-hop citizens, parents, activist and faith seekers.

Learning how to provide care to traumatized, angry and undirected youth and young adults requires pastoral care like any other setting—secular or spiritual. Because Hip-hop is a culture that promotes honesty, or “keeping it real,” the amount of content that comes out of these spaces can be overwhelming for those who are not used to its demeanor. Ergo, pastoral counseling teaches us to meet people where they are by allowing them to express themselves outside of the familial/communal setting to assure their creative artistic ideas, thoughts and emotions have a support system, confidentiality and love.

APPENDIX I

HIP-HOP DECLARATION OF PEACE

The Hip-hop Declaration of Peace

This Hip-hop Declaration of Peace guides Hip-hop Culture toward freedom from violence, and establishes advice and protection for the existence and development of the international Hip-hop community. Through the principles of this Hip-hop Declaration of Peace we, Hip-hop Culture, establish a foundation of Health, Love, Awareness, Wealth, peace and prosperity for ourselves, our children and their children's children, forever.

For the clarification of Hip-hop's meaning and purpose, or when the intention of Hip-hop is questioned, or when disputes between parties arise concerning Hip-hop; Hip-hoppas shall have access to the advice of this document, The Hip-hop Declaration of Peace, as guidance, advice and protection.

First Principle

Hip-hop (Hip'Hop) is a term that describes our independent collective consciousness. Ever growing, it is commonly expressed through such elements as Breakin, Emceein, Graffiti Art, Deejayin, Beatboxin, Street Fashion, Street Language, Street Knowledge and Street Entrepreneurialism. Wherever and whenever these and future elements and expressions of Hip-hop Culture manifest; this Hip-hop Declaration of Peace shall advise the use and interpretation of such elements, expressions and lifestyle.

Second Principle

Hip-hop culture respects the dignity and sanctity of life without discrimination or prejudice. Hip-hoppas shall thoroughly consider the protection and the development of life, over and before the individual decision to destroy or seek to alter its natural development.

Third Principle

Hip-hop culture respects the Laws and agreements of its culture, its country, its institutions and whomever it does business with. Hip-hop does not irresponsibly break Laws and commitments.

Fourth Principle

Hip-hop is a term that describes our independent collective consciousness. As a conscious way of life, we acknowledge our influence on society, especially on children; and we shall forever keep the rights and welfare of both in mind. Hip-hop Culture encourages womanhood, manhood, sisterhood, brotherhood, childhood and family. We are conscious not to bring any intentional disrespect that jeopardizes the dignity and reputation of our children, elders and ancestors.

Fifth Principle

The ability to define, defend and educate ourselves is encouraged, developed, preserved, protected and promoted as a means toward peace and prosperity, and toward the protection and the development of our self-worth. Through knowledge of purpose and the development of our natural and learned skills, Hip-hoppas are encouraged to always present their best work and ideas.

Sixth Principle

Hip-hop Culture honors no relationship, person, event, act or otherwise wherein the preservation and further development of Hip-hop's culture, principles and elements are not considered or respected. Hip-hop Culture does not participate in activities that clearly destroy or alter its ability to productively and peacefully exist. Hip-hoppas are encouraged to initiate and participate in fair trade and honesty in all negotiations and transactions.

Seventh Principle

The essence of Hip-hop is beyond entertainment: The elements of Hip-hop Culture may be traded for money, honor, power, respect, food, shelter, information and other resources; however, Hip-hop and its culture cannot be bought, nor is it for sale. It cannot be transferred or exchanged by or to anyone for any compensation at any time or at any place. Hip-hop is the priceless principle of our self-empowerment. Hip-hop is not a product.

Eighth Principle

Companies, corporations, non and not-for-profit organizations, as well as individuals and groups that are clearly benefiting from the use, interpretation and/or exploitation of the term Hip-hop, (i.e. Hip Hop, hip-hop,) and the expressions and terminologies of Hip-hop, (i.e. Hip Hop, hip-hop,) are encouraged to commission and/or employ a full-time or part-time certified Hip-hop cultural specialist to interpret and answer sensitive cultural questions regarding the principles and proper presentations of Hip-hop's elements and culture; relative to businesses, individuals, organizations, communities, cities, as well as other countries.

Ninth Principle

May 3rd is Rap Music Day. Hip-hoppas are encouraged to dedicate their time and talent to self-development and for service to their communities. Every third week in May is Hip-hop Appreciation Week. During this time, Hip-hoppas are encouraged to honor their ancestors, reflect upon their cultural contributions and appreciate the elements and principles of Hip-hop Culture. November is Hip-hop History Month. During this time Hip-hoppas are encouraged to participate in the creating, learning and honoring of Hip-hop's history and historical cultural contributors.

Tenth Principle

Hip-hoppas are encouraged to build meaningful and lasting relationships that rest upon Love, trust, equality and respect. Hip-hoppas are encouraged not to cheat, abuse, or deceive their friends.

Eleventh Principle

The Hip-hop community exists as an international culture of consciousness that provides all races, tribes, religions and styles of people a foundation for the communication of their best ideas and works. Hip-hop Culture is united as one multi-skilled, multi-cultural, multi-faith, multi-racial people committed to the establishment and the development of peace.

Twelfth Principle

Hip-hop Culture does not intentionally or voluntarily participate in any form of hate, deceit, prejudice or theft at any time. At no time shall Hip-hop Culture engage in any violent war within itself. Those who intentionally violate the principles of this Declaration of Peace or intentionally reject its advice, forfeit by their own actions the protections set forth herein.

Thirteenth Principle

Hip-hop Culture rejects the immature impulse for unwarranted acts of violence and always seeks diplomatic, non-violent strategies in the settlement of all disputes. Hip-hoppas are encouraged to consider forgiveness and understanding before any act of retaliation. War is reserved as a final solution when there is evidence that all other means of diplomatic negotiation have failed repeatedly.

Fourteenth Principle

Hip-hoppas are encouraged to eliminate poverty, speak out against injustice and shape a more caring society and a more peaceful world. Hip-hop Culture supports a dialogue and action that heals divisions in society, addresses the legitimate concerns of humankind and advances the cause of peace.

Fifteenth Principle

Hip-hoppas respect and learn from the ways of Nature, regardless of where we are on this planet. Hip-hop Culture holds sacred our duty to contribute to our own survival as independent, free-thinking beings in and throughout the Universe. This planet, commonly known as Earth is our nurturing parent and Hip-hoppas are encouraged to respect Nature and all creations and inhabitants of Nature.

Sixteenth Principle

Hip-hop's pioneers, legends, teachers, elders, and ancestors shall not be inaccurately quoted, misrepresented, or disrespected at anytime. No one should profess to be a Hip-hop pioneer or legend unless they can prove with facts and/or witnesses their credibility and contributions to Hip-hop Culture.

Seventeenth Principle

Hip-hoppas are encouraged to share resources. Hip-hoppas should give as freely and as often as possible. It is the duty of every Hip-hoppa to assist, whenever possible, in the relief of human suffering and in the correction of injustice. Hip-hop is shown the highest respect when Hip-hoppas respect each other. Hip-hop culture is preserved, nurtured and developed when Hip-hoppas preserve, nurture and develop one another.

Eighteenth Principle

Hip-hop culture maintains a healthy, caring and wealthy, central Hip-hop guild fully aware and invested with the power to promote, teach, interpret, modify and defend the principles of this Hip-hop Declaration of Peace.

APPENDIX J

HIP-HOP DECLARATION OF SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

Hip-hop Declaration of Spiritual Beliefs

Hip-hop Ministries Inc.

1. We believe in the Most High God, known by many attributes; the Spirit of immortality within us, expressing through us as us; Creative Intelligent Energy, One absolute self-existent Force, Divine Mind, which manifest Itself in and through ALL creation. Each person has the individual free will to choose the personal name of his or her choice.
2. We believe ALL creation are the expressions of ONE universal Spirit which is activated as the indwelling intelligence, power and presence in the personal life of all creation. It is through individual consciousness that Spirit is experienced, we choose to experience Spirit through Hip-hop, a Higher Infinite Power Healing Our People.
3. We believe in the ancient wisdom of the Holy Bible, the Holy Qu'ran, the Gospel of Hip-hop and various sacred texts that have been revealed through many people, cultures, languages and expressions in human history. We activate this knowledge in our daily living through the metaphysical Truth teachings of Jesus, as our elder brother, wayshower and teacher.
4. We believe that daily prayer, meditation and communion with God helps us develop a collective consciousness that allows us to help control the destiny of ourselves, our children and their children's children forever.
5. We believe that God allows each person to be on Earth to fulfill a divine purpose that only he or she can complete. The ultimate goal of life is to discover what your divine purpose is and live it fully. You must have the courage to be YOU in all circumstances, free from any fear, guilt and doubt of any kind.
6. We believe in the direct revelation of Truth through the intuitive, spiritual and mental nature of humanity, any person has the potential to become a revealer of the Truth. Spirit operates through our thoughts, words and actions which produces the universal Law of manifestation.
7. We believe that Heaven is a consciousness of love, peace, harmony, joy, awareness prosperity and wholeness within you. Hell is a consciousness of hatred, confusion, chaos, sadness, ignorance, poverty is a consciousness of hatred, confusion, chaos, sadness, ignorance, poverty and sickness within you. We believe each person experiences Heaven or Hell on Earth, according to his or her individual consciousness.
8. We believe through the elements of Hip-hop Kulture, we are spiritually connected to our ancient ancestors, we respect their wisdom, guidance and protection as we travel on our path to fulfill our mission here on Earth.

9. We believe that as human expressions of Spirit, we have a responsibility to assist each other with the healing of human suffering and injustice in every area where it exists on Earth through spiritual, cultural, educational, economic and political action.

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